

# **MA'ARIFUL-QUR'AN**

By  
**MAULANA MUFTI MUHAMMAD SHAFI'**

Translated by  
Prof. Muhammad Hasan Askari,  
Prof. Muhammad Shamim

Revised by  
Justice Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani

**Volume 1**

(Surah Al-Fatihah, Al-Baqarah)

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
الحمد لله وكفى، وسلام على عباده الذين اصطفى

## FOREWORD

by

**Justice Maulanā Muḥammad Taqī Usmānī**

Ma'āriful-Qur'ān is the name of a detailed Urdu commentary of the Holy Qur'ān written by my father Maulanā Mufti Muḥammad Shafi' (رحمة الله عليه). He was one of the eminent scholars who served as a professor and as a grand Mufti of Darul-Uloom Deoband, the well-known university of the Islamic Sciences in the sub-continent of India. In 1943, he resigned from Darul-Uloom, due to his active involvement in the Pakistan movement, and when Pakistan came into existence, he migrated to Karachi where he devoted his life for this new homeland of the Muslims and served the country in different capacities. He also established Darul-Uloom Karachi, an outstanding institute of Islamic Sciences on the pattern of Darul-Uloom Deoband, which is regarded today as the biggest private institute of higher Islamic education in Pakistan.

He was a prolific writer who left behind him about one hundred books on different Islamic and literary subjects. Ma'āriful-Qur'ān was the last great work he accomplished four years before his demise.

The origin of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān refers back to the third of Shawwal 1373 A.H. (corresponding to the 2nd of July 1954) when the author was invited to give weekly lectures on the Radio Pakistan to explain selected verses of the Holy Qur'ān to the general audience. This invitation was accepted by the author on the condition that he would not accept any remuneration for this service and that his lectures would be broadcast without any interference by the editing authorities. The permanent title of this weekly programme was

"Ma'āriful-Qur'ān" (The Wisdom of the Holy Qur'ān) and it was broadcast every Friday morning on the network of Radio Pakistan.

This series of lectures continued for ten years upto the month of June 1964 whereby the new authorities stopped the programme for reasons best known to them. This series of lectures contained a detailed commentary on selected verses from the beginning of the Holy Qur'ān upto the Sūrah Ibrāhīm (Sūrah no. 14).

This weekly programme of Radio Pakistan was warmly welcomed by the Muslims throughout the globe and used to be listened to by thousands of Muslims, not only in Pakistan and India but also in Western and African countries.

After the programme was discontinued, there was a flood of requests from all over the world to transfer this series in a book-form and to complete the remaining part of the Holy Qur'ān in the shape of a regular commentary.

These requests persuaded the esteemed author to revise these lectures and to add those verses which were not included in the original lectures. He started this project in 1383 A.H. (1964) and completed the commentary of Surah al-Fatihah in its revised form and started the revision of Surah al-Baqarah. However, due to his numerous involvements he had to discontinue this task, and it remained unattended during the next five years.

In Shawwal 1388 (1969) the esteemed author suffered from a number of diseases which made him restricted to his bed. It was during this ailment that he restarted this work while on bed and completed Sūrah al-Baqarah in the same condition. Since then he devoted himself to the "Ma'āriful-Qur'ān". Despite a large number of obstacles in his way, not only from the political atmosphere of the country and the difficult responsibilities he had on his shoulders in different capacities, but also from his health and physical condition, he never surrendered to any of them and continued his work with a miraculous speed until he accomplished the work in eight volumes (comprising of about seven thousand pages) within five years only.

After appearing in a regular book-form, Ma'āriful-Qur'ān was highly appreciated and widely admired by the Urdu-knowing Muslims throughout the world. Thousands of copies of the book are still circulated every year, and the demand for the book is so increasing

that it has always been a problem for its publisher to satisfy the demand to its optimum.

## **A Few Words about the present English**

### **Translation of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān**

Let me say a few words about the present English translation of the Ma'āriful-Qur'ān.

Although a large number of English translations of the Holy Qur'ān is available in the market, yet no comprehensive commentary of the Holy Qur'ān has still appeared in the English language. Some brief footnotes found with some English translations cannot fulfil the need of a detailed commentary. Besides, they are generally written by the people who did not specialize themselves in the Qur'ānic sciences, and their explanatory notes do not often reflect the authentic interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān. Some such notes are based on an arbitrary interpretation having no foundation in the recognized principles of the exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān, and are thus misleading for a common reader.

On the other hand, during the last few decades, the Muslim population has increased among the English speaking countries in enormous numbers. These people and their new generations need a detailed commentary of the Holy Qur'ān which may explain to them the correct message of the last divine book with all the relevant material in an authentic manner which conforms to the recognized principles of *tafsīr* (the exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān).

Since Ma'āriful-Qur'ān was the latest book written on these lines and was proved to be beneficial for a layman as well as for a scholar, it was advised by different circles that its English translation may fulfill the need.

It made me look for a person who might undertake the task, not only with his professional competence, but also with his commitment to serve the Holy Qur'ān.

Fortunately, I succeeded in persuading Prof. Muḥammad Ḥasan Askarī, the well-known scholar of English literature and criticism, to undertake the translation. In the beginning he was reluctant due to his strong sense of responsibility in the religious matters, but when I assured him of my humble assistance throughout his endeavor, he not

only agreed to the proposal, but started the work with remarkable devotion. Despite my repeated requests, he did never accept any honorarium or a remuneration for his service. He was a chain-smoker. But he never smoked during his work on Ma'ariful-Qur'an, which sometimes lasted for hours.

In this manner he completed the translation of about 400 pages of the original Urdu book and 156 verses of the Sūrah al-Baqarah, but unfortunately, his sudden demise discontinued this noble effort. Strangely enough, the last portion he translated was the commentary of the famous verse:

ولنبلونكم بشيءٍ من الخوف والجوع ونقص من الاموال والا نفس والثمرات  
وبشر الصابرين ٥ الذين اذا اصابهم مصيبة قالوا انا لله وانا اليه راجعون ٥

And surely, We will test you with a bit of fear and hunger and loss in wealth and lives and fruits. And give good tidings to the patient who, when they suffer a calamity, say, 'We certainly belong to Allah and to Him we are bound to return'.

Prof. Askari passed away in 1977, and due to my overwhelming occupations during the next 12 years, I could not find out a suitable person to substitute him. It was in 1989, that Prof. Muhammad Shamim offered his services to resume the translation from where Prof. Askari had left it. I found in him the same sincerity, commitment and devotion I had experienced in the late Professor. Moreover, he had decided to devote the rest of his life to the service of the Holy Qur'an without any financial benefit. Here again I tried my best to persuade him to accept some kind of honorarium, but it was in vain. He started his work from the Verse 158 of Surah al-Baqarah and has now completed the translation of the first two volumes of the original Ma'ariful-Qur'an and is working on the third volume.

Both Prof. Muhammad Hasan Askari and Prof. Muhammad Shamim have insisted that their translations must be revised by me from the religious point of view. For this purpose, I have gone through the typescript of the translations of both of them and suggested some amendments where it was necessary.

The translation of Prof. Askari had been started at a time when the esteemed author of Ma'ariful-Qur'an was still alive. We were fortunate to receive some guide-lines from the author himself. He had

advised the translators not to be too literal in translation to sacrifice the natural flow of the text. Moreover, he had emphasized that while rendering his book into English, the requirements of English readership must be kept in mind. Some discussions may be dispensed with. Similarly, many paragraphs may be condensed in the English version in order to avoid repetition.

The esteemed author had authorised me for suitable decisions in these matters. Both the learned translators, despite their earnest effort to reflect the original text as accurately as possible, have followed, in consultation with me, the said advices of the author himself. However they have never tried to sacrifice the original concept of the text for the beauty of language alone. Particularly, in the juristic discussions of the book, they have been very strict in the translation, lest some change in the style should creep in and distort the accurate connotation of the Islamic injunctions. In such places, the reader may feel some difficulty. However, a more concentrate reading can easily remove it.

### **Translation of the Holy Qur'ān**

The original Urdu Ma'āriful-Qur'ān had not given a new translation of the Holy Qur'ān itself. Rather, the esteemed author had adopted the Urdu translations of Maulanā Maḥmūdūl-Ḥasan (Shaikhul-Hind) and Maulanā Ashraf Ali Thānavī on which he based his commentary. While rendering the book into English, we had three options about the translation of the Holy Qur'ān:

- (a) To adopt any one of the already available English translations of the Holy Qur'ān, like those of Arberry, Pickthall or Abdullāh Yousuf Ali.
- (b) To translate the Urdu translations used in the Ma'āriful-Qur'ān into English.
- (c) To provide a new translation of our own.

After a great deal of consideration and consultation, we elected to work on the third option, i.e. to prepare a new translation of the Holy Qur'ān. The reasons behind this decision were manifold which need not be detailed here. In short, we wanted to prepare a translation which may be closer to the Qur'ānic text and easier to understand. For this purpose, we formed a committee with the following members:



1. Prof. Muḥammad Shameem.
2. Mr. Muḥammad Wali Raazi.
3. This humble writer.

This committee has accomplished the translation of the Holy Qur'ān upto the Sūrah Yūsuf and is still going on with this project.

The committee has all the famous available translations of the Holy text before it, and after a deep study of the relevant material found in the classical Arabic commentaries, lays down the new translation in as simple expressions as possible. While doing so, we have tried our best that the different possible interpretations of the Qur'anic text remain undisturbed, and the new translation accommodates as many of them as practicable. We have tried not to impose on our reader a particular interpretation where several interpretations were equally possible. However, where the translation could not accommodate more than one connotation, we have followed the one adopted by the majority of the classic commentators including Maulanā Ashraf Alī Thānavī on whose translation the Ma'āriful-Qur'ān is based.

Despite all these sincere efforts, one cannot avoid the admission that the exact translation of the Holy Qur'ān is impossible. One cannot convey the glory and the beauty of the divine expression in any other language, let alone the English language which, despite its vast vocabulary, seems to be miserable when it comes to the expression of spiritual concepts. Therefore, even after observing all the precautions at our command, we feel that we were trying to translate a text which is - as Arberry has rightly put it - totally untranslatable.

However, this is another humble effort to convey the basic message of the Holy Qur'ān to a common reader in a simple manner. How far we have succeeded in this effort? Allah knows best.

### **The Scheme of the Translation**

Now, here are some points to be kept in mind while consulting the translation.

1. Although the translators have tried their best to preserve not only the literal sense of the Holy text, but also the order of words and sentences, yet, while translating the idiomatic expressions, it is

sometimes felt that the literal translation may distort the actual sense or reduce the emphasis embodied in the Arabic text. At such places effort has been made to render the Quranic sense into a closer English expression.

2. Both in the translation of the Holy Qur'ān and in the commentary, a uniform scheme of transliteration has been adopted. The scheme is summarized in the beginning pages of the book.

3. The names of the prophets have been transliterated according to their Arabic pronunciation, and not according to their biblical form. For example, the biblical Moses has been transliterated as Mūsā عليه السلام, which is the correct Arabic pronunciation. Similarly, instead of biblical Abraham, the Qur'ānic Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and instead of Joseph, the Qur'ānic Yūsuf عليه السلام has been preferred.

However, in the names other than those of prophets, like Pharaoh, their English form has been retained.

4. A permanent feature of the original Urdu Ma'arif-ul-Qur'an is its "*Khulasa-e-Tafseer*" (Summary). Under every group of verses, the esteemed author has given a brief summary of the meaning of the verses to help understand them in one glimpse. This summary was taken from Bayān-ul-Qur'ān, the famous commentary of Maulanā Ashraf Ali Thānavī رحمه الله عليه. He has set up this summary by adding some explanatory words or sentences within brackets to his Urdu translation. The esteemed author of Ma'arif-ul-Qur'an has reproduced this summary (after simplification in some places) with the heading of-Khulasa-e-Tafsir خلاصہ تفسیر before his own commentary to the relevant group of verses.

While translating Ma'arif-ul-Qur'an into English, it was very difficult, rather almost impossible, to give that summary in the same fashion. Therefore, the translators have restricted themselves to the commentary of Ma'arif-ul-Qur'an and have not translated the Khulasa-e-Tafsir خلاصہ تفسیر. However, where they found some additional points in the summary which are not expressly mentioned in the commentary, they have merged those points into the main commentary, so that the English reader may not be deprived of them.

It is only by the grace of Allah Almighty that in this way we could be able to present this first volume of this huge work. The second

volume is already under composing, and we hope that Allah سبحانه و تعالی will give us *tawfiq* to bring the next volumes as soon as possible.

Acknowledgments are due to all those who contributed their efforts, advices and financial support to this work. Those deserving special reference are Prof. Abdul-Wahid Siddiqi, Dr. Zafar Ishaq Ansari, Mr. Abubakr Varachia and Mr. Shu'aib 'Umar (both of South Africa) Dr. Muhammad Ismail (of U.S.A), and Mr. Altaf Barkhurdaria.

My elder brother Mr. Muḥammad Wali Raazi has been associated with the work right from its beginning, and has always been a great source of guidance, support and encouragement. He is a member of the committee set up for the translation of the Holy Qur'ān and his remarkable contribution, not only to the translation of the Holy Qur'ān, but also to the translation of the commentary is unforgettable. He, too, has been contributing his valuable time and effort to this project for years just for the sake of Allah. May Allah approve his contributions with His pleasure and bless him with the best of rewards both here and hereinafter.

As for Prof. Muhammad Shameem, the original translator of Ma'āriful-Qur'ān after the demise of Prof. Muḥammad Hasan 'Askari, all the formal words of acknowledgment seem to be miserably deficient for the valuable service he has rendered to this project. He has not only translated the book with precaution and love, but also devoted his whole life to the Holy Qur'ān and spared no effort to bring this volume into light. Out of his commitment to the cause, he did not restrict himself to the work of a translator, but also undertook the function of an editor and a proof reader and supervised all other minute details of the publishing process. His devotion, sincerity and hardwork is beyond any amount of admiration. May Allah grant him the best reward of His absolute approval for his noble work. *Amin*.

With these few words I am honoured to present this first volume to the readers. May Allah approve this effort and make it beneficial to the *Ummah*. 'Amin.

**Muḥammad Taqī Usmāni**

Darul-Uloom, Karachi-14

10 Safar 1416

9 July 1995

# TRANSLITERATION SCHEME

Arabic Letter	Name of Letter	English Transliteration
ا	الف -- Alif	a
ب	باء -- bā	b
ت	تاء -- tā	t
ث	ثاء -- thā	th
ج	جيم -- jīm	j
ح	حاء -- hā	h
خ	خاء -- khā	kh
د	دال -- dāl	d
ذ	ذال -- dhāl	dh
ر	راء -- rā	r
ز	زاي -- zā	z
س	سين -- sin	s
ش	شين -- shin	sh
ص	صاد -- sād	ṣ
ض	ضاد -- dād	ḍ
ط	طاء -- tā	ṭ
ظ	ظاء -- zā	ẓ
ع	عين -- 'ayn	'
غ	غين -- ghayn	gh
ف	فاء -- fa	f
ق	قاف -- qāf	q
ك	كاف -- kāf	k
ل	لام -- lām	l
م	ميم -- mīm	m
ن	نون -- nūn	n
هـ	هـاء -- ha	h
و	واو -- wāw	w
ء	همزة -- Hamzah	'
ي	ياء -- yā	y

## Short Vowels

اَ  
اِ  
اُ

: Fathah a  
: Kasrah i  
: Dammah u

## Long Vowels

آ  
أ  
إ

: Shortened Alif ā  
: Maddah Alif ā  
: Maddah Yā ī  
: Maddah Wāw ū

## Diphthongs

أى  
او

: Alif and Yā ay  
: Alif and Wāw aw (also au in some cases)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
الحمد لله وكفى وسلام على عباده الذين اصطفى

## PREFACE

This is an introduction comprising of some basic informations about the Holy Qur'an its revelation, the history of its descention and preservation and similar other subjects. This introduction was written by me on the direction of my father, the esteemed author of Ma'ariful-Qur'an. He wanted to write this introduction himself, but due his many other involvements and his deteriorating health, he could not do so. At this stage he directed me to write on these subject. When I started writing the introduction, it became a lengthy volume itself and it was not proper to include it in the Ma'ariful-Qur'an as an introduction. Therefore, the book was published separately under the title of "Uloom-ul-Qur'an" and I condensed its discussions to the present introduction, which was published in the beginning of the second edition of 'Ma'ariful-Qur'an'.

This introduction is translated into English by Prof. Muhammad Shameem after he accomplished the translation of the first volume of Ma'ariful-Qur'an. My book "Uloom-ul-Qur'an" is now available in English also. Those who like detailed discussions on these subjects may refer to it.

Muhammad Taqi Usmani  
11 Safar 1416 A.H.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم  
الحمد لله وكفى وسلام على عباده الذين اصطفى

## ***Wahy* and its true nature**

Since the Holy Qur'ān was revealed to our beloved prophet Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā صلى الله عليه وسلم by means of *Wahy* (revelation), an understanding of some particulars about *Wahy* is imperative at the very outset.

### **The need for *Wahy***

Every Muslim knows that Allah Almighty has sent man into this world as a matter of test, and in return for his being obligated with certain duties, the whole universe has been placed at his service. For this reason man, once he is in the world, must do two things:

1. He should make the best use of this world, and of things created in it.
2. While using this world to his advantage, he should keep the injunctions of Allah Almighty in sight and do nothing that goes against His will and pleasure.

For these two functions man needs knowledge. Therefore, unless he knows the reality of this world, the properties of different things and the manner in which they can be put to use, he cannot use anything in this world to his advantage. Likewise, unless and until he knows the will of Allah Almighty as to what pleases Him and what displeases Him, it will be impossible for him to lead a life in line with the will of Allah Almighty.

So Allah Almighty, along with the creation of man, has created three things through which he could continue receiving knowledge of the above-mentioned matters of concern. These are:

1. Man's senses, that is, the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth, the hands and the feet.
2. The reason.
3. The *Wahy*.

Consequently, man finds out many things through his senses, many others through reason, and the knowledge of things he cannot get through these two sources are bestowed upon him through *Wahy*.

The arrangement between these three sources of knowledge is such that each one has its limits, and a particular sphere of activity beyond which it does not work. In natural sequence, the knowledge of things man collects through his senses cannot be deduced through bland reason. For instance, you know by seeing a wall with your eyes that its colour is white. But, should you close your eyes and try to find out the colour of that wall on the sole strength of your reason, this will then be impossible. Similarly, the knowledge of things that comes through reason cannot be discovered by senses alone. For instance, you cannot find out as to who made that wall by simply seeing it with your eyes or touching it with your hands. Not at all, you rather need reason to arrive at that conclusion.

In short, reason gives no guidance as far as the five senses work efficiently, and when the five senses become helpless, reason starts functioning. But, even the guidance given by this reason is not unlimited. This too stops at a certain limit. Then there are things the knowledge of which can neither be acquired through senses nor through reason. For instance, to find out about this very wall, as to what manner of its use will please Allah Almighty and what manner of its use will displease Him, is possible neither through senses nor through reason. In order to give man the answer to such questions, the source that Allah Almighty has prescribed is what is known as *Wahy*. And the method it follows is that Allah Almighty selects one of His servants, ordains him as His messenger and to him He reveals His Word. This Word is *Wahy*.

This makes it clear that *Wahy* is the highest source of knowledge for man which offers to him the answer to questions about his life which cannot be solved by means of reason and senses, but, he still

has to have that knowledge. This further explains that reason and perception alone are not enough to show man the way. It is rather all the more necessary, almost inevitable, that the Divine *Wahy* be there for his guidance. Since *Wahy* is basically needed where reason does not work, it is, therefore, not necessary that everything communicated through *Wahy* be compulsively comprehended through reason. On the contrary, as reason is no help in finding out the colour of some object since that is the job of the senses, so is the knowledge of many religious beliefs, the gracious giving of which is the sole prerogative of *Wahy* and not of reason. Furthermore, trusting reason alone for their comprehension is not sound and correct.

To begin with, it is totally senseless to discuss the issue of *Wahy* with a person who, God forbid, does not accept the very existence of God. But, for a person who believes in the existence of Allah Almighty and has faith in His perfect power, it is not at all difficult to understand that *Wahy* is a rational need, that it is possible and that it is there for real. If you have faith in the fact that this universe has been created by an absolutely powerful entity, He is the One who has sent man down here to accomplish some particular mission, how then is it possible to imagine that He, after once having created man, would leave him off in total darkness, without ever telling him why did he come into this world, what his duties were, where was he destined to go and how could he realize the purpose of his life? How could a person, whose sanity is still there, send one of his servants on a certain trip under a designated mission without ever telling him the purpose of the trip while he is leaving, nor explaining it to him later on through some message as to why he has been sent out there and what duties he is supposed to carry out during the trip? When a man of ordinary reason cannot do something like this, how can something like this be imagined with respect to the most Holy Lord of the Universe under Whose ultimate wisdom this whole system of the universe is functioning? After all, how is it possible that the Being, that did create such a mind-boggling system composed of the moon, the sun, the sky, the earth, the stars and the planets, would remain unable to institute some arrangement of communication with His servants, through which human beings could be given guidance about the purpose of their lives? If there is *Īmān* or faith in the ultimate wisdom of Allah



Almighty, then admitting that He did not forsake His servants in the dark, will become all the more necessary; rather on the contrary, He has surely instituted some regular system for their guidance. And so, this very regular system of guidance is known as *Wahy* (Revelation) and *Risālah* (Prophethood).

This makes it crystal clear that *Wahy* is not only a religious belief but also a rational need the rejection of which amounts to a rejection of the ultimate wisdom of Allah Almighty.

### The Modes of Descent

This sacred sequence of *Wahy* (revelation) and *Risālah* (prophethood) came to an end with the last of the prophets, Muḥammad al-Mustafā صلى الله عليه وسلم. Nevermore, shall *Wahy* descend upon any man, nor there is need for it. *Wahy* used to come to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in several forms and modes. In a *hadīth* from Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah رضى الله عنها says that Sayyidnā Hārith ibn Hishām رضى الله عنه once asked the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as to how did *Wahy* come to him. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said that 'there are times when I hear something like the chiming of bells and this mode of *Wahy* is the hardest on me. After that, when this chime-sequence ends, that which has been said by the sound seems to have been committed to my memory. And there are times when the angel appears before me in the shape of a man.' (Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, 2/1)

As regards the likening of the sound of *Wahy* to the sound of bells in the *hadīth* cited above, Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī has explained it by saying that, in the first place, the sound of *Wahy* is continuous like the sound of a bell which does not break off in between; and in the second place, when the bell rings continuously, it generally becomes difficult for the listener to determine the direction of its sound because its sound seems to be coming from all directions. And the Divine Word too carries with it the distinction that it has no one single direction, in fact, the sound gives the impression of being heard from all directions. A correct realization of this phenomenon is just not possible without auditory experience, however, in order to bring this happening closer to common comprehension, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has simply likened it to the sound of bells. (Fayd al-Bari,

With the descent of *Wahy* in this mode, the Holy Prophet ﷺ came under very heavy strain. Sayyidah ‘A’ishah رضى الله عنها says towards the end of this very *hadith* that she had seen the coming of *Wahy* to him during days of extreme winter. When the progression of *Wahy* ceased, his blessed forehead would have already become dripping-wet inspite of the chilly weather. In yet another narration, Sayyidah ‘A’ishah رضى الله عنها relates: When *Wahy* came to him, his breath would seem to stop, the radiant face would change -- turning pale like the branch of a date palm, the front teeth would shiver from cold and he would perspire so much that its drops would roll like pearls. (Al-Itqan, 1/46)

On occasions, so much intensity would be generated in this state of *Wahy* that the animal he would be riding at that time would sit down, wilting under his weight. Once, when he was resting his blessed head on the lap of Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضى الله عنه there started the descent of *Wahy* in that very posture. This released so much weight on Sayyidnā Zayd's thigh that it seemed to break. (Zad al-Ma‘ad, 1/18,19)

There were times when a low-volumed sound of this *Wahy* was sensed by others as well. Sayyidnā ‘Umar رضى الله عنه says: When *Wahy* came to him, a sound somewhat similar to the buzzing of honey-bees could be heard close to his most bright face. (Tabwib Musnad Ahmad, Kitab al-Sirah al-Nabaviyah, 20/212)

Under the second mode of *Wahy*, an angel would come to him in some human form and deliver Allah's message. Generally, on such occasions, Sayyidnā Jibrā‘īl عليه السلام used to come to him in the form of Sayyidnā Dihyah al-Kalbi رضى الله عنه. Certainly, at other times, he has come in other forms as well. In any case, this mode of the coming of *Wahy* when it was brought by Sayyidnā Jibrā‘īl عليه السلام appearing in human form, was the easiest on the Holy Prophet ﷺ. (Al-Itqan, 1/46)

The third mode of the coming of *Wahy* used to be that Sayyidnā Jibrā‘īl عليه السلام would appear as he was, without having taken on the shape of a man. But this has happened only thrice in his entire life-time. First of all, it was when the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had himself wished to see him in his real form and shape. The second time, it was in the Mi‘rāj (the Ascent to Heaven), and the third time it was at Ajjād in Makkah al-Mukarramah during the very early days of

prophethood. The first two happenings stand proved authentically, however, the last one suffers from weak chains of authority and is, therefore, doubtful. (Fath al-Bārī. 1/18,19)

The fourth mode is distinguished by a direct, non-intermediary, two-way conversation with Allah Almighty. This honour was bestowed upon the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم only once, that is, in Mi'rāj, while awake. In addition to that, once it was in a dream as well that he was in a conversing situation with Allah Almighty.

Under the fifth mode of *Wahy*, it so happened that Sayyidnā Jibrā'il عليه السلام would, without appearing physically in any form whatsoever, let some words of the message fall into his heart. This is technically known as نفث في الروح (*naftḥ fī al-rau'*: blowing into the heart) (Ibid).

### The Chronology of the Revelation of the Qur'ān

The noble Qur'ān is, in fact, the Divine Word. It is, therefore, secure in the Preserved Tablet. The noble Qur'ān says: **بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَّجِيدٌ فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ** (Rather, it is the glorious Qur'ān in the Preserved Tablet). (85:21-22)

Then, from the Preserved Tablet, its descention took place twice. Once, the whole of it had been sent to *al-Bayt al-'Izzah*, the most exalted House on the firmament of the world. The most exalted House (also known as *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*) is a House facing Ka'bah that exists in the firmament as the place of worship for angels. This descention took place on the Night of *Qadr* (rendered as the Night of Power in English). The second time it used to be revealed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم gradually as needed, having reached its completion in twenty three years. These two modalities of the Qur'anic revelations become clear through the style of the noble Qur'ān itself. In addition to that, al-Nasā'i, al-Baihaqī and al-Hākim and others have reported from Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه what can be summed up by saying that the first descention of the noble Qur'ān to the firmament of the world took place all at one time and the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was blessed with the second descention gradually. (al-Itqān, v. 1, p. 41)

Explaining the wisdom behind the first descention of the noble

Qur'ān on the firmament facing the world, Inam Abu Shamah has said that it aimed at demonstrating the exalted majesty of the noble Qur'ān, and at the same time, it was to tell the angels that this was the last Book of Allah which is ready for descension for the guidance of the people of the earth.

Shaykh al-Zurqānī makes yet another point when he says that this two-timed descension also aimed at stressing that this Book is beyond all doubts, and it stands preserved at two more places other than the blessed heart of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, that is, in the Preserved Tablet, and in the Exalted House. (Manahil al-'Irfan, v.1, p. 39).

It is almost agreed by all the scholars that the second gradual descension which was on the heart of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم began when his age was forty years. The beginning of this descension, as authentically reported, was in the Night of *Qadr*, and this was the date on which, some years later, the event of the Battle of Badr came to pass. However, nothing definite can be said about the exact date of Ramaḍān when this Night fell. There are some reports which identify that of the seventeenth Rāmaḍān, while others place it on the nineteenth, and still others which indicate the Night of the twenty-seventh. (Tafsir Ibn Jarir v. 10, p. 7)

### The verses that came first

It is authentically said that the first verses to come to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم were the verses from which Sūrah al-'Alaq begins. As in Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Sayyidah 'A'ishah رضى الله عنها while relating its background has said that the very first beginning of revelations to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم actually was through true dreams. Following that, came his zeal to worship in seclusion. During this period, he would spend night after night in the Cave of Hira' and stay in the state of *I'tikāf* devoted to his *'ibādah* (worship) when one day, right there in that cave, there came an angel from Allah Almighty and the very first thing he said was *اقْرَأْ* (*Iqra'*: 'Read'). The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: *مَا أَنَا بِقَارِئٍ*: 'I am unable to read.' After that, relating the event himself, he said that 'the angel, hearing this answer of mine, caught hold of me and embraced me with such force that I had to go through unbearable strain.' Then he released me and said: *اقْرَأْ*: 'Read'. I said: 'I am unable to read.' Thereupon, he seized me the third time,

gave a hard embrace and then released me. After that he said:

إِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ  
الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ۝ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ۝

Recite with the Name of your Lord who created, created Man out of a blood-clot. Recite and Your Lord is Most Generous who taught by the Pen, taught Man what he did not know. (96:1-3)

These were the first verses to be revealed to him. Thereafter, the coming of *Wahy* stayed discontinued for three years. This period is known as the period of *fatrah*, that is, the period when *Wahy* was discontinued for a short interval of time. Then, it was after three years that the same angel who had visited him in the Cave of Hirā' became visible to him between the heaven and the earth. He read to him the verses of Sūrah al-Muddaththir. Thereafter, the sequence of *Wahy* was reactivated.

### The Makki and Madani Verses

While looking at the titles of the Surahs of the Holy Qur'ān, you may have noticed the entry, *Makki* (or Meccan, Makkan, *Makkiyyah*) with some Surāhs, and *Madani* (Medinan, Medinite, *Madaniyyah*) with some others. It is necessary to understand correctly what it means. In the terminology of the commentators, the '*Makki* 'āyah' means a verse that was revealed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم earlier than he actually reached Madīnah by way of *hijrah* (emigration). Similarly, the '*Madani* 'āyah' or the *Madani* verse means that it was revealed after he migrated to Madīnah. Some people take '*Makki*' to mean that the verse concerned was revealed in the city of Makkah, and so the '*Madani*' is supposed to have been revealed in Madīnah. This view is not correct because there are several verses which were not revealed in the city of Makkah, yet are called *Makki* because they had already been revealed before *hijrah*. As such, the verses that were revealed in Minā, 'Arāfat, or during the Journey of Ascent (*Mi'rāj*) are also called *Makki*. So much so, that the verses revealed during the journey of *hijrah* enroute Madīnah are also called *Makki*. Similarly, there are several verses which were not revealed in the city of Madīnah, but they are *Madani*. For example, there were several journeys that the Holy Prophet ﷺ had to undertake while

going many hundred miles away from Madīnah, and the verses revealed at all those places are called *Madanī* anyway. So much so that the particular verses that were revealed on the occasion of the Conquest of Makkah or the military campaign of Hudaibīyah in the city of Makkah proper or its environs are also called *Madanī*. Accordingly, the Qur'ānic verse:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا

Surely, Allah commands you to fulfil trust obligations towards those entitled to them. (4:58)

is *Madanī* although it was revealed in Makkah al-Mukarramah. (al-Burhan, v. 1, p. 88, and Manahil al-Irfan, v. 1, p. 88)

Then there are *Sūrahs* which are either totally *Makki*, or totally *Madanī*. For instance, *Sūrah al-Muddaththir* is wholly *Makki* and *Sūrah 'Al-'Imran* is wholly *Madanī*. But, on occasions, it has so happened that one or some *Madani* verses find a place in the *Sūrah* which is wholly *Makki*. On other occasions, it has happened just the reverse. For instance, *Sūrah al-A'raf* is *Makki*, but in it the verses from *وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ* to *وَأَسْأَلُكُمْ عَنِ الْغَرْبَةِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ حَاضِرَةً الْبَحْرُ* are *Madanī*. Similarly, *Sūrah al-Hajj* is *Madanī* but four of its verses, that is, those from *عَذَابٌ يَوْمَ عَقِيمٍ* to *وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ وَلَا نَبِيٍّ إِلَّا إِذَا تَلَّكَ* are *Makki*.

This also makes it clear that the incidence of a *Sūrah* being *Makki* or *Madanī* is generally conditioned by the nature of the majority of its verses and so it happened frequently that the initial verses of a *Sūrah* which were revealed before *Hijrah* were regarded as *Makki*, although some of its verses may have been revealed later on following *Hijrah*.

(Manahil al-Irfan, v. 1, p. 192)

### Characteristics of *Makki* and *Madanī* Verses

The scholars of *Tafsir*, after having made a thorough investigation into the *Makki* and *Madanī* *Sūrahs*, have come up with a set of characteristics that tell right off if a *Sūrah* is *Makki* or *Madanī*. Some of these characteristics are recognized as universal rules while others hold good most of the time. The universal rules are as follows:

1. Every *Sūrah* in which the word *كَلَّا* (never) appears is *Makki*. This word has been used 33 times in 15 *Sūrahs*, and all these verses are in the last half of the noble Qur'an.

2. Every Sūrah in which (according to the Hanafīyyah) there appears a verse of *Sajdah* is *Makki*.
3. Every Sūrah, with the exception of Sūrah al-Baqarah, in which the story of Ādam and Iblīs finds mention is *Makki*.
4. Every Sūrah in which a permission of *jihād* or a description of its injunctions has been given is *Madani*.
5. Every verse which mentions the hypocrites is *Madani*.

The following characteristics are general and mostly frequent, that is, sometimes the contrary may happen, but usually and mostly it follows the said pattern:

1. In *Makki* Sūrahs, generally, the form of address used is يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ (O people), and in *Madani* Surahs it is يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا (O believers).
2. The *Makki* 'Ayat (Verses) and Sūrahs are generally short and brief while the *Madani* verses and chapters are long and detailed.
3. The *Makki* Sūrahs mostly consist of subjects such as, Oneness of Allah, Prophethood, affirmation of the Hereafter, the panorama of the Resurrection, words of comfort for the Holy Prophet ﷺ and events relating to the past communities, and in these, the number of injunctions and laws taken up is much less as compared with the *Madani* Surahs where family and social laws, injunctions of *jihād* and expositions of limits and duties appear frequently.
4. In *Makki* Sūrahs, most of the confrontation is against idolaters while in *Madani* Sūrahs it is against the people of the Book and the hypocrites.
5. The style of *Makki* Sūrahs is more majestic. It has profusion of metaphors, similies and allegories, and the vocabulary used is extensive. Contrary to this, the style of the *Madani* Sūrahs is comparatively simple.

This difference in the style of *Makki* and *Madani* Surahs initially owes its origin to a variety of conditions, circumstances and addressees. Muslims had to deal mostly with the idolaters of Arabia during their Makkan life. No Islamic state was born yet. Therefore,

during this period, more emphasis was laid on the correction of beliefs, reform of morals, logical refutation of the idolaters and the miraculous nature of the noble Qur'an. Contrary to this, an Islamic state had risen in the Holy city of Madinah. People were rushing into the fold of Islam, group after group. Idolatry stood refuted intellectually. The ideological confrontation was now wholly against the people of the Book. Therefore, greater attention was paid to education in injunctions, laws, limits and duties, and on the refutation of the people of the Book. The style adopted matched these objectives.

### The Gradual Revelation of the Noble Qur'an

As said earlier, the noble Qur'an was not revealed to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم suddenly and simultaneously. On the contrary, it was revealed, little by little, over a span of nearly twenty three years. At times, Jibrā'il عليه السلام would come with a small verse, or even with some unit of a verse. Then, there were times when several verses would be revealed at one time. The smallest portion of the Qur'an which was revealed as such is غَيْرِ أُولَى الضَّرَرِ (al-Nisā': 4:94) which forms part of a long verse. On the other hand, the whole of Sūrah al-An'am was revealed at one time. (Ibn Kathir, v. 2, p. 122)

Rather than being revealed all at once, why was the Qur'an revealed little by little? The polytheists of Arabia had themselves put this question to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Allah Almighty has taken it upon Himself to answer the question in the following words:

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ لَا نَزَّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَّاحِدَةً كَذَلِكَ لِنُثَبِّتَ بِهِ فُؤَادَكَ وَرَتَّلْنَاهُ تَرْتِيلًا وَلَا يَأْتُونَكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلَّا جِئْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَأَحْسَنَ تَفْسِيرًا

The disbelievers said, "Why has the Qur'an not been sent down upon him all at once?" "(We did) like this, so that We may strengthen your heart thereby, and We have recited it very distinctly. They bring not to thee any similitude but that We bring thee the truth, and better in exposition" (25:32-33)

It is sufficient to understand a gist of the wisdom behind the gradual revelation of the Holy Qur'an as stated by Imam al-Rāzī in his explanation of this verse. He says:

1. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was *ummiyy*, that is, being unlettered, he did not read or write. So, had the entire Qur'an been



revealed at one time, it would have been difficult to remember and document. Contrary to this, Sayyidnā Musā عليه السلام knew reading and writing, therefore, the Torah was revealed to him at one single time.

2. If the entire Qur'ān had been revealed all at once, immediate compliance of all its injunctions would have become obligatory, and this would have gone against the wise graduation which has featured as a matter of concern in the Shari'ah of our Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم

3. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had to go through ever-new tortures inflicted by his people. That Jibrā'il عليه السلام came, again and again, with the words of the noble Qur'an, made his stand against these tortures bearable, and gave strength to his heart.

4. A large portion of the Qur'ān is devoted to answers given to people who posed questions, while some other portion refers to various particular events. Therefore, the revelation of those verses was appropriate at the time when those questions were asked, or those events came to pass. This increased the insight of Muslims and when the Qur'ān unfolded that which was unseen, its truth became all the more manifest. (al-Tafsir al-Kabir, v. 6, p. 336)

### ***Sabab al-nuzul: (Cause of revelation)***

The verses of the noble Qur'ān are of two kinds. In the first place, there are the verses that Allah Almighty revealed on His own. Their revelation was not caused by some particular event or a question asked by someone. In the second place, there are those verses which were revealed in answer to some question or with reference to some event. This could be termed as the background of these verses. This background is known, in the terminology of the commentators, as the 'sabab' of *nuzūl* ('cause' of revelation) or the 'shā'n' of *nuzūl* (the 'background' of revelation). For instance, take the verse in Sūrah al-Baqarah:

لَا تَنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكَةَ حَتَّىٰ يُؤْمِنَ وَلَا مِمَّنْ مُؤْمِنَةٌ حَيْرٌ مِّنْ مُّشْرِكَةٍ وَلَا وَلَوْ عَجَبْتَكُمْ

Do not marry female associators unless they come to believe, and a Muslim slave girl is better than a female associator, even though she is liked by you. (2:221)

This verse was revealed in the wake of a particular event. During

the days of Ignorance, Sayyidnā Marthad ibn Abī Marthad al-Ghanavī رضي الله عنه had a relationship with a woman, named 'Anaq. After embracing Islam, he migrated to Madīnah while that woman stayed behind in Makkah al-Mukarramah. There was an occasion when Sayyidnā Marthad visited Makkah al-Mukarramah on a certain business. 'Anaq came to him with an invitation to sin. Sayyidnā Marthad refused flatly and said: 'Now Islam has come between me and you, but should you so wish, I can marry you after clearing it with the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم'. After returning to Madīnah, Sayyidnā Marthad sought his permission to marry the woman he said he liked. Thereupon, this verse was revealed, and it prohibited marriage with *mushrik* women. (Asbab al-Nuzul by al-Wahidi, p. 38)

This event is the '*shā'n*' or '*sabab*' of *nuzūl* ('cause' or 'background' of revelation) behind the verse mentioned above. The background of revelation is, therefore, very important in the exegesis of the noble Qur'ān. There are many verses the meaning of which cannot be correctly understood unless the circumstances underlying their revelation become known.

### **The Seven Readings of the Holy Qur'ān**

In order that the noble Qur'ān becomes easily recitable, Allah Almighty has blessed the Muslim community with special convenience by allowing it to read the words of the Qur'ān in more than one way. If there are situations when a person is unable to pronounce some words in one manner, he could recite it in another. It appears in a *ḥadīth* of Sahīh Muslim that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was once sitting by the pond of Banu Ghifar while Angel Jibrā'īl came and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to ask your community to recite the Qur'ān following one method of reading.' He said: 'I seek from Allah His pardon and forgiveness. My people do not have the ability to do so.' Then, Angel Jibrā'īl returned to him and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'ān following two readings.' He said: 'I seek pardon and forgiveness from Allah Almighty. My people do not have the ability to do even that.' Then, Jibrā'īl came the third time and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'ān following three readings.' Again he said: 'I seek pardon and forgiveness from Allah Almighty. My

people do not have the ability to do even that.' Then he came the fourth time and said: 'Allah Almighty has commanded you to let your people recite the Qur'ān following seven readings. So, whichever of these they follow to read the Qur'ān, their recitation will be correct.'

(Manahil al-'Irfan, v. 1, p. 33)

Accordingly, there is yet another *ḥadīth* where the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said:

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ أُنْزِلَ عَلَى سَبْعَةِ أَحْزَفٍ فَأَقْرَأْهُ وَامَاتِسِرْ مِنْهُ

This Qur'an has been revealed covering seven versions. So from out of these, recite in a way that is easy on you.

What is meant by 'Seven Versions' in this saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ? There are several scholarly positions in this connection but according to scholars who have conducted painstaking and exhaustive research on the subject, the weightier meaning of this expression is that the variations found in different readings of the Holy Qur'an are of seven types. These are as follows:

**1. The difference in nouns:** This includes the difference concerning singular, dual, plural, as well as, masculine and feminine. For instance, in one reading it is *كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّكَ*, while in another, *كَلِمَاتُ رَبِّكَ*.

**2. The difference in verbs:** That there be past in one reading, the present in another and the imperative in yet another. For instance, it is *رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا* in one reading, while *رَبَّنَا بَعِدْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا* in another.

**3. The difference in the placement of diacritical marks:** That which shows variance in *I'rāb*, which reflects variance in grammatical mode of a word and is demonstrated through desinential inflections, such as *kasrah*, *fathah*, *dammah*. For instance, reading *لَا يُضَارُّ كَاتِبٌ* as *لَا يُضَارُّ كَاتِبٌ* and *دُؤَالْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ* as *دُؤَالْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ*.

**4. The difference caused by addition and deletion of words:** That there be some word missing in one reading while it has been added on in another; for instance, the words *تَجَرَّى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ* appear in one reading while the words *تَجَرَّى تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ* appear in another.

**5. The difference of precedence and succession:** That there is a word which precedes in one reading, while it succeeds in the other.

For instance *وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْحَقِّ بِالْمَوْتِ* and *وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْمَوْتِ بِالْحَقِّ*.

**6. The difference caused by transposition:** This happens when a word found in one reading is replaced by another word in another reading. For instance, *نُنَشِّرُهَا* and *نَنْشُرُهَا*, also *فَتَبَيَّنُوا* and *فَتَبَيَّنُوا*, and *طَلَعَ* and *طلع*.

**7. The difference caused by manners of reading:** It includes variations in *tafkhīm* (velarization, making sound heavy), *tarqīq* (making a letter sound soft), *imālah* (inclination, bending the sound of a short vowel), *madd* (prolongation), *qasr* (to shorten), *hamz*: *hamzatation* (providing a letter with *hamzah*), *izhār* (clear pronunciation) and *idghām* (assimilation). It means that, by doing these, the actual word does not change but the mode of its pronunciation does change. For instance, the word, *مُوسَى* is rendered as *مُوسَى* in one of the readings.

Anyhow, many readings were revealed incorporating these seven types of different renderings. This difference between them really made no difference in meaning. The latitude so given was aimed at making recitation easy.

In the beginning, people were not totally used to the style of the Qur'ān, therefore, many readings were permitted within the radius of these seven types. But, it was the blessed practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that he would go through the entire revealed Qur'ān with *Jibrā'il* عليه السلام during the month of Ramaḍān every year. The year he left this mortal world, that was the year he did so twice. This 'daur' or meticulous re-reading of the Qur'ān is called *العرضة الأخيرة* (last review). On this occasion, many readings were abrogated. Only readings retained were the ones which continue to stay preserved to this day with uninterrupted succession.

Sayyidnā 'Uthman رضى الله عنه, during the period of his *khilafah*, arranged to have seven copies of the noble Qur'ān prepared in order to remove misgivings regarding the recitation of Qur'ān. He incorporated all readings in these seven copies by leaving the calligraphed verses of the noble Qur'ān without dots and desinences (the vowel-points) so that the text could be read in accordance with whichever reading one wished to follow from among the very readings cited. Thus most of the

readings merged into this script, and the readings that could not merge into the script were saved by him when he elected to have one copy written according to one reading, and another, in accordance with another reading. The community demonstrated such care and diligence in having the fondly-remembered readings collected in these copies that *Qirā'ah* developed into a branch of knowledge in its own right, and there rose hundreds of scholars, reciters and memorizers of the Holy Qur'ān who spent their entire spans of life to keep it preserved and protected.

What actually happened was that when Sayyidnā 'Uthman رضى الله عنه sent the seven copies of the noble Qur'ān to various areas, he had also sent particular reciters who could teach how to recite them. So, when these revered reciters reached their designated areas, they taught people to read the Qur'ān in accordance with their respective readings. These different readings spread out among people. At this stage, some people bequeathed their lives to memorize different readings, and in training others to continue the discipline. This is how the foundation of the 'science of readings' was laid and people from different parts of the Islamic world started turning to the masters of the discipline to achieve the highest of excellence in it. Some memorized only one reading, others did two or three or seven, or even more than that. In this connection, a standard rule was accepted as norm throughout the *ummah* and it was invariably followed everywhere. It stipulated that only such reading (*qirā'ah*) will be accepted as being the Qur'ān which fulfils three conditions:

1. There is room for it in the script of 'Uthmani' copies of the Qur'ān.
2. It conforms to the grammar of the Arabic language.
3. It should have, provenly -- with sound authority, originated from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, and be well-known among the masters of readings, that is, the Imāms of *Qirā'ah*.

A reading which lacks even one of these three requirements cannot be considered as part of the Qur'ān. Thus a large number of readings continued to be reported in uninterrupted succession. Then, as a matter of convenience, it so happened that an Imām started giving

instructions in one, or some selected readings, and that particular reading became identified with his name. Then, scholars started writing books to collect these readings. So, Imam Abu 'Ubayd Qāsim ibn Sallām, Imām Abū Ḥātim Sijistānī, Qāḍī Ismā'īl and Imām Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī were the first among those who compiled books in this field which included more than twenty readings. Then came the great scholar, Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid (died 324 Hijrah) who wrote a book in which he had included readings from seven *qārīs* (reciters) only. This book of his became so popular that these readings from the seven *qaris* became much more famous as compared with those of other *qaris*. In fact, some people got used to thinking that these are the only sound readings coming in uninterrupted succession. Although, the truth of the matter is that 'Allāmah ibn Mujāhid has collected these seven readings in one place just by chance. He never meant that readings other than these were wrong or unacceptable. This act of 'Allāmah ibn Mujāhid created yet another misunderstanding when some people began to think that *سبعة احرف* (seven versions) means just these seven readings which have been collected by ibn Mujāhid. Although, it has been explained earlier that these seven readings are simply a part of sound readings, otherwise every reading that fulfils the above-mentioned three conditions perfectly is sound, acceptable and included within the seven versions (*Hurūf*) in which the noble Qur'an was revealed.

### The Seven *Qārīs*

Anyhow, the seven *qārīs* who became most famous as a result of this act of 'Allāmah ibn Mujāhid are:

1. 'Abdullah ibn Kathīr al-Darī (died 120 Hijrah). He was fortunate enough to have seen Sayyidnā Anas ibn Mālik, 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr and Abu Ayyūb al-Ansārī رضى الله عنهم from among the Companions. His reading became more famous in Makkah al-Mukarramah. Well-known among those who transmitted his rendition are Bazzī and Qambal, may Allah have mercy on them all.

2. Nafi' ibn 'Abd Al-Rahmān ibn Abī al-Nu'aym (died 169 Hijrah). He had the benefit of learning from seventy successors to the Companions who were direct disciples of Sayyidnā 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās and Abū Hurayrah رضى الله عنهم. His reading became more famous in Madīnah and among those who transmitted

his rendition, Abū Mūsā Qālūn (died 220 Hijrah) and Abu Sā'id Warsh (died 197 Hijrah) are better known.

3. 'Abdullāh al-Hisbī, better known as Ibn 'Amir (died 118 Hijrah). He was fortunate to have seen Sayyidnā Nu'mān ibn Bashīr and Wāthilah ibn Asqā' رضى الله عنهم from among the Companions. He had learnt the art of Qur'ānic reading from Mughīrah ibn Shihāb al-Makhzūmī who was a disciple of Sayyidnā 'Uthman رضى الله عنه. His reading gained currency mostly in Syria, and more famous among those who transmitted his rendition are Hishām and Dhakwān.

4. Abū 'Amr Zabbān ibn al-'Alā (died 154 Hijrah). He has reported his rendition from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās and 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b رضى الله عنهم through *Mujāhid* and Sa'id ibn Jubayr. His reading became fairly well-known in Basrah. Abū 'Umar al-Dawrī (died 246 Hijrah) and Abū Shu'ayb al-Sūsī (died 261 Hijrah) are among the more famous transmitters of his rendition.

5. Hamzah ibn Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt, ex-slave of 'Ikramah ibn Rabī' al-Taymī (died 188 Hijrah). He is a disciple of Sulayman al-A'mash, who was a disciple of Yahyā ibn Waththāb, who was a disciple of Zirr ibn Ḥubaysh, and he had the benefit of learning from Sayyidnā 'Uthmān, 'Alī and 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضى الله عنهم. Among his transmitters, Khalf ibn Hishām (died 188 Hijrah) and Khallād ibn Khālīd (died 220 Hijrah) are more famous.

6. 'Āṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd al-Asadiyy (died 127 Hijrah). Through Zirr ibn Hubaysh, he is a disciple of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضى الله عنهم and through Abū 'Abd al-Rahman Sulamī and al-Asadiyy, he is a disciple of Sayyidnā 'Alī رضى الله عنهم. More famous among the transmitters of his rendition are Shu'bah ibn 'Ayyāsh (died 193 Hijrah) and Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān (died 180 Hijrah). Generally, the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān these days is made following the rendition of this very Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān.

7. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ḥamzah al-Kisā'i (died 189 Hijrah). Among his transmitters, Abū al-Ḥarith Marwāzī (died 240 Hijrah) and Abū 'Umar al-Dawrī (who is also a transmitter of Abū 'Amr) are better known. The readings of the later three became more common in Kūfah.

As it has been submitted earlier that several other readings, other than these seven, are sound and have been reported in uninterrupted succession. However, when the misunderstanding that sound readings are limited to these seven started gaining currency, several scholars (for example, 'Allāmah Shadhā'ī and Abū Bakr ibn Mihrān) collected, instead of seven, ten readings in one book. Thereupon, the term, "*Al-qirā'āt al-'ashrah*" or "Ten Readings" became famous. In these ten readings, the readings by the following three were also included in addition to those of the seven mentioned above:

1. Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Ḥaḍramī (died 205 Hijrah). His rendition was famous mostly in Baṣrah.
2. Khalf ibn Hishām (died 205 Hijrah) who is also a transmitter of the rendition of Hamzah. His rendition was common mostly in Kūfah.
3. Abū Ja'far Yazīd ibn al-Qa'qā' (died 130 Hijrah). His rendition found wider currency in Madīnah al-Tayyibah.
4. Abū al-Faraj Shambūdhi (died 388 Hijrah) who was a resident of Baghdād.

Some scholars have counted Sulaymān al-A'mash among the fourteen *qārīs* in place of Shambūdhi. Out of these, the first ten readings are credited with uninterrupted succession as vouched by sound authority.

Other than these are *Shādhdh* or rare (Manahil al'Irfan with reference to Munjid al-Muqri'in by ibn al-Jazri).

## **The Preservation of the Holy Qur'an**

### **In the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ**

Since the noble Qur'an was not revealed all at once, on the contrary, different verses from it used to have been revealed as and when appropriate, therefore, it was not possible from the very beginning to write and preserve it in a book form. So, during the initial stage of Islam, major emphasis was laid on memory as a means of preserving the noble Qur'an. When *Waḥy* used to come in the very beginning, the Holy Prophet ﷺ would tend to repeat its words instantly so that they would be memorized well enough. Thereupon, Allah Almighty directed him through the verses of Sūrah al-Qiyāmah



that he need not repeat words in a hurry immediately as *Wahy* came. Allah Almighty would Himself endow him with a memory that he will be unable to forget the words of the *Wahy* once its descention has been completed. So it was that the moment the Qur'ānic verses would come to him, they would be committed to his memory the next moment. Thus the blessed chest of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, was the most protected vault of the noble Qur'ān, in which there was no chance of even some common mistake, editing or alteration. Moreover, as a matter of additional precaution, he used to recite the Qur'ān before angel Jibrā'il عليه السلام every year during the month of Ramadān; and the year he left this mortal world he completed a cumulative review of Qur'ānic recitation (*daur*) twice with Jibrā'il عليه السلام (Sahih al-Bukhari with Fath al-Bari, p. 36, v. 9).

Again, as it was, he would not restrict his teaching of the Companions to just the meanings of the noble Qur'ān, but had them memorize its words as well. Then, the revered Companions were themselves so enamoured with the desire to learn and remember the noble Qur'ān that everyone of them was anxious to get ahead of the other. There were women who claimed no *mahr* (dower) from their husband except that they would teach the Qur'ān.

Hundreds of Companions, freeing themselves from all other concerns, had devoted their whole lives for this purpose. Not only did they memorize the Qur'ān but also went on repeating it within their nightly prayers. When someone migrated from Makkah al-Mukarramah and came to Madinah al-Tayyibah, says Sayyidnā 'Ubādah ibn Sāmit رضي الله عنه, the Holy Prophet ﷺ would entrust him to one of us Ansars so that he could teach Qur'ān to the newcomer. The Mosque of the Prophet was so filled with voices generated by learners and teachers of the Qur'ān that the Holy Prophet ﷺ had to ask them to lower their voices so that mistakes are not made (Manahil al-Irfan, 1/234).

So, within a fairly short time, there was on hand a large group of the noble Companions who had the glorious Qur'ān all committed flawlessly to their memory. Included in this group were, in addition to the Four Guided Caliphs, persons like Sayyidnā Ṭalḥah, Sayyidnā Sa'd, Sayyidnā Ibn Mas'ūd, Sayyidnā Ḥudhayfah ibn Yamān, Sayyidnā Sālim Mowla abī Ḥudhayfah, Sayyidnā Abū Hurayrah, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, Sayyidnā 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbās,

Sayyidnā 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, Sayyidnā 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, Sayyidnā Mu'āwiyah, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn al-Ṣā'ib, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah, Sayyidah Ḥafṣah, Sayyidah Umm Salmāh, may peace be upon them all.

In short, memorization of the Qur'ān was given more emphasis in early Islam as this was the only protected and trust-worthy method given the conditions of that time. The reason is that the number of people who could read or write was very limited in those days. The means of publishing books, such as the printing press, etc., were not there. Therefore, in that situation, if writing was taken to be sufficient, it would have neither been possible to spread out the Qur'an on an extensive scale nor to protect it reliably. In its place, Allah Almighty had blessed the people of Arabia with a memory of such dimensions that thousands of poetic lines would normally rest in the memory of one person after another. Ordinary, run-of-the-mill villagers would remember by heart their genealogies and those of their families, and unbelievably enough - even those of their horses! Therefore, this power of memory was well utilized for the conservation and protection of the noble Qur'ān and it was through it that the verses and chapters of the noble Qur'ān reached all over into the far corners of Arabia.

### The writing of *Wahy*

Besides having the Qur'ān committed to memory, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم made special arrangements to have the Qur'ān committed to writing as well. Sayyidna Zayd ibn Thābit رضى الله عنه says: 'I used to write down the words of *Wahy* for him. When *Wahy* came to him he felt burning with heat and the drops of perspiration would start rolling down on his body like pearls. When this state would go away from him, I would present myself before him with a shoulder-bone or a piece (of something else). He would go on dictating and I would go on writing. When I would be finished with writing, the sheer weight of copying the Qur'ān would give me the feeling that my leg is going to break and I would never be able to walk. In any case, when I would be finished with writing, he would say: 'Read'. I would read it back to him. If there was a shortcoming, he would have it corrected and then let it be known to people (Majma' al-Zawaid with reference to Tabrani 1/156).

Besides Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضى الله عنه , there were many other Companions who carried out the duty of committing the *Wahy* to writing. Some of those who can be specially mentioned, in addition to the Four Guided Caliphs, are Sayyidnā 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Sayyidnā Zubayr ibn 'Awwām, Sayyidnā Mu'āwiyah, Sayyidnā Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah, Sayyidnā Khālīd ibn al-Walīd, Sayyidnā Thābit ibn al-Qays, Sayyidnā Abān ibn Sa'īd and others (Fath al-Bari, 9/18)

Sayyidnā 'Uthman says that it was the blessed practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that he, soon after the revelation of a certain portion of the Qur'ān, would pointedly instruct the scribe of the *Wahy* to write it in such Sūrah after such and such verse ( for details see Fath al-Bari, 9/18 and Zad al-Ma'ad 1/30).

Since paper was not available in Arabia during those days, therefore, these Qur'ānic verses were mostly written on stone slabs, parchments, date branches, bamboo units, tree leaves and animal bones. However, at times, paper pieces have also been used (Ibid., 9/11).

Thus, there existed, during the times of the Holy Prophet ﷺ , a copy of the noble Qur'ān which he had arranged to be committed to writing under his supervision. Although, it was not there as a formally prepared book, but it certainly was there in the form of various units of available writing materials. Along with it, it was also the practice of some revered Companions that they would make copies of the Qur'ānic verses and keep them for personal recollection. This practice was common since the very early period of Islam. Accordingly, much before Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه embraced Islam, his sister and brother-in-law had in their possession verses of the Qur'ān which they had written and kept in book form (Sirah ibn Hisham).

### **Preservation: In the period of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه**

However, it was characteristic of all copies of the noble Qur'ān made during the days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that they were either written on different available writing surfaces, for instance, a verse would appear on parchment, another on tree leaf and yet another on a bone; or they were not complete copies. One Companion would have only a single Sūrah in his record while someone else would have five or ten Sūrahs and some others will have only a few verses. Then there were Companions having in their possession explanatory sentences as well along with the text of the verses.

On these grounds, Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه, during his tenure of Khilafah, thought it necessary to bring together all these scattered units of the Qur'ān and thus have them preserved. The motives and the methods behind this great achievement of his have been explained in detail by Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضى الله عنه when he says: "One day, soon after the battle of Yamamah, Sayyidnā Abū Bakr sent a message calling me in. When I reached him, Sayyidnā 'Umar was present there. Sayyidnā Abū Bakr said to me: 'Umar has come just now and he tells me that a large group of *Huffāẓ* (those who had committed the Qur'ān to memory) have met their death as martyrs in the battle of Yamāmah. If the *Huffāẓ* of the noble Qur'ān continue to meet their *shahadah* (martyrdom) in this manner, I am afraid a large portion of the Qur'ān may just go extinct. So, in my view, you should begin the task of having the Qur'ān collected together under your order'. I said to 'Umar: 'How can we do what the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself did not do?' 'Umar replied: 'By God, this is for nothing but good.' After that, this is what 'Umar continued telling me, until I too started seeing the truth, and now, my view was the same as 'Umar's'. After that Sayyidnā Abū Bakr told me: 'You are young, and intelligent. We have no doubts about you. You have been working as a scribe of *Wahy* as well under the supervision of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, so you search and collect the verses of the noble Qur'ān'."

Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit says: "By God, had these blessed people commanded me to haul some mountain, that would have been much less weightier than this duty of collecting the Qur'ān. I said to them: 'How are you doing something that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم did not do?' Sayyidnā Abū Bakr said: 'By God, this is good, nothing but good.' After that, this is what Sayyidnā Abū Bakr kept saying to me again and again until Allah Almighty put my heart at rest for the same view that was the view of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr and 'Umar. Consequently, I started searching for the Verses of the Qur'ān and it was from the branches of date palms, slabs of stones and hearts of people that I finally collected the noble Qur'ān." (Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab Fada'il al-Qur'an)

At this point while we are dealing with the process of the collection of the Qur'ān, we should have a clear perception of the method used by

Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضى الله عنه . As mentioned earlier, he was himself a *Hafīẓ* of the Qur'ān, therefore, he could have written down the whole Qur'ān from his memory. In addition to that, there were hundreds of *Huffāẓ* (memorizers of the Qur'ān: plural of *Hafīẓ*) present at that time; the noble Qur'ān could have still been written down by entrusting the duty to a selected group from out of them.

Also, the copies of the noble Qur'ān committed to writing during the times of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم could have been used by Sayyidnā Zayd to make his copy of the Qur'ān. But he, guided by his caution and concern, did not limit himself to any one of the many methods available. On the contrary, by using all these methods simultaneously, he did not allow any verse to be included in his master copy of the Qur'ān unless he received written and verbal testimonies proving its uninterrupted succession. In addition to that, the verses that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had arranged to be written under his supervision, were still preserved by the Companions. Sayyidnā Zayd collected them together so that the new copy be made from them. Consequently, a public proclamation was made to the effect that anyone possessing any number of written verses of the noble Qur'ān should bring them over to Sayyidnā Zayd. When a written verse was brought to him by someone, he used to verify its authenticity by the following four methods:

(1) To begin with, he tested its reliability against his own memory.

(2) Then, Sayyidnā 'Umar too was a *Hafīẓ* of Qur'ān, and as proved by reliable reports, Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه had assigned him too to work with Sayyidnā Zayd on this project. When someone came with some verse, Sayyidnā Zayd and Sayyidnā 'Umar used to receive it jointly (Fath al-Bari with reference to ibn Abi Dawud).

(3) No written verse was accepted until such time that two trustworthy witnesses had testified to the fact that the particular verse was written in the presence of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم (al-Itqan, 1/10)

(4) After that, these verses in writing were collated with collections that different Companions had prepared for themselves (al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, by Zarkashi, 1/238).

If this functional methodology behind the collection of the Qur'ān

during the period of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه is kept in mind, it would become perfectly simple to understand what Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit meant when he said: "I found the last verses of Sūrah al-Barā'ah beginning with: لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ with Sayyidnā Abū Khudhaymah رضى الله عنه only. They were not found with anyone else except him."

This never means that no person other than Sayyidnā Abū Khudhaymah رضى الله عنه remembered these verses, or somebody else did not have these in the written form, or anyone other than him did not know of their being part of the Qur'ān. On the contrary, it means that these verses were not found with anyone from among those who were coming along with different verses written as dictated by the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Otherwise, as far as the fact of these verses being part of the Qur'ān is concerned, everyone knew it in an uninterrupted succession. There were hundreds of Companions who remembered it as well. Moreover, these were available in writing with Companions who possessed complete collections of the Qur'ānic verses. But, among those written separately under the supervision of the Holy Prophet ﷺ this verse was found only with Sayyidnā Abū Khudhaymah رضى الله عنه and not with anyone else (al-Burhan, 1/234-45).

So, in every way possible, it was with great caution and concern that Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضى الله عنه, by collecting the Qur'ānic verses, wrote them out in an organized form on pages of paper (al-Itqan, 1/60).

But, each Surah was written in separate folios, therefore, this copy was composed of many folios. In the terminology of Qur'ānic Studies, this copy is called the "*Umm*" (literally, 'the mother', meaning 'the original') and it had the following features:

1. In this copy, the Qur'ānic verses were indeed arranged in accordance with the order identified by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, but the Sūrahs were not so arranged, rather they were written separately (Ibid).

2. Incorporated in this copy were all seven *Hurūf* (versions) of the Qur'ān (which have been explained earlier). (Manhil al'Irfan, 1/246 and Tarikh al-Qur'an by al-Kurdi, p. 28)

3. Collected here were all verses the recitation of which has not been abrogated.

4. The purpose of having this copy made in writing was to prepare an organized document with the collective endorsement of the whole *ummah*, so that, reference can be made to it when needed.

These folios committed to writing on the orders of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه remained with him during his life-time. Then, they remained with Sayyidnā ‘Umar رضى الله عنه. After the martyrdom of Sayyidnā ‘Umar, they were transferred to the custody of Umm al-Mu’minin Sayyidah Ḥaḥṣah رضى الله عنها. After the death of Sayyidah Ḥaḥṣah رضى الله عنها, Mārwan ibn al-Ḥakam had these burnt since the copies of Qur’ān ordered by Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضى الله عنه were ready at that time, and a consensus of the *ummah* had already been reached to the effect that following these copies of the Qur’ān, in script and arrangement of Sūrah, was obligatory. Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam thought it inadvisable to let any copy which was contrary to this script and arrangement remain in existence (Fath al-Bari, 9/16).

### **Preservation: In the period of Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضى الله عنه**

When Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضى الله عنه became Khalifah, Islam had grown out of Arabia reaching into the far-flung areas of Byzantium and Iran. As people from new areas embraced Islam, they would learn the noble Qur’ān from the Mujāhidin of Islam or from the traders because of whom they had found the blessing of Islam. On the other side, you have already read that the noble Qur’ān was revealed incorporating seven versions with various readings, and different Ṣahābah (Companions) had learnt it from the Holy Prophet ﷺ in accordance with different readings, therefore, every Companion taught Qur’ān to his disciples in accordance with that particular reading which they had themselves learnt from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. In this manner, this difference in readings reached far-out countries. Until such time that people knew that the noble Qur’ān has been revealed incorporating seven Ḥurūf (versions) no harm was done by this difference. However, when this difference reached those far-out countries, and the fact that the noble Qur’ān has been revealed incorporating different readings was not fully publicised there, disputes among people started showing up. Some people began to insist on their reading as correct and that of others as incorrect. On

the one hand, these disputes posed the danger that people would fall into the grave error of declaring the readings of the noble Qur'ān which have followed in uninterrupted succession as incorrect. On the other hand, there was no such standard copy available throughout the Islamic world which could become the rallying authority for the entire *ummah*, except, of course, the copy committed to writing by Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit رضى الله عنه which was there in Madīnah. Since other copies were written individually, and in them, there was no provision to incorporate all the readings, therefore, the only reliable method to resolve these disputes was that copies which incorporate all valid readings be spread out all over the Islamic world, and then, by seeing them it could be decided as to which reading is correct and which, incorrect. Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه accomplished this very remarkable feat during the period of his *Khilāfah*.

Details of this feat, as given in *ḥadīth* narrations, inform us that Sayyidnā Hudhayfah ibn Yamān رضى الله عنه was engaged in *jihād* on the Armenian-Azerbaijan front. There he noticed that differences were rising among people about readings of the noble Qur'ān. So, on his return to Madīnah, he went straight to Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه and once there, he pleaded: '*Yā Amīr al-Mu'minīn!* Before this *Ummah* falls a prey to differences in the Book of Allah like the Jews and Christians, you should do something about it.' Sayyidnā 'Uthmān asked: 'What is the matter?' In reply, Sayyidna Hudhayfah said: 'I was on a *jihād* mission fighting on the Armenian front. There I saw people of Syria following the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b which would not be familiar to the people of 'Irāq, and the people of Irān follow the reading of 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd which would not be familiar to the people of Syria. As a result of this, they are charging each other of being *kāfīrs*.'

In fact, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه had himself sensed the danger much earlier. He was told that there were cases right there in Madīnah al-Tayyibah itself where a teacher of the noble Qur'ān would teach the text to his disciples in accordance with one reading, and another teacher would do so in accordance with another reading. In this way, when the disciples of different teachers came together, differences would crop up between them, and there were occasions when this difference would extend to teachers, and they too, would declare each other's reading to be incorrect. When Sayyidnā



Hudhayfah ibn Yamān رضى الله عنه too invited his attention to this danger, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه convened a meeting of some highly-regarded Companions and sought their advice. He said: 'I have been informed that there are people who say to each other things like - "my reading is better than yours" - and this could touch the extreme limits of *kufr*. So, what is your opinion in this connection?' The Companions themselves asked Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه: 'What are your own thoughts on this subject?' Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه said: 'I believe we should unite everyone on one Book so that we face no difference or division.' The Companions, approving of this opinion, supported Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه.

Consequently, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه gathered people together and delivered a sermon and in it he said: "You who live so close to me in Madīnah, if you can falsify each other and differ with each other in respect of the readings of the noble Qur'ān, it is quite obvious that those who are far away from me will be indulging in falsification and disputation on a much larger scale. Therefore, let everyone get together and come up with a copy of the Qur'ān following which becomes obligatory for all."

With this in view, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه sent a message to Sayyidah Ḥaḥṣah رضى الله عنها requesting her to let them have the blessed folios of the Qur'ānic text (prepared under the orders of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه which she had in her custody). He promised that these will be returned to her after copies have been made. Sayyidah Ḥaḥṣah رضى الله عنها sent these pages of the Qur'ān to Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه. He then formed a group of four Companions which was composed of Sayyidnā Zayd ibn Thābit, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr, Sayyidnā Sa'īd ibn al-'Āṣ and Sayyidnā 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Hārith ibn Hishām رضى الله عنهم اجمعين. This group was entrusted with the duty of making several copies from the original copy of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr's Qur'ānic folios and making sure that Sūrahs too are arranged in order. Out of these four Companions, Sayyidnā Zayd was an Ansāri, while the rest of the three were Qurayshis. Therefore, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه said to them: 'When you and Zayd differ in respect of any portion of the Qur'ān (that is, differ as to how a certain letter should be written) you write it in the language of the Quraysh because the noble Qur'ān has been revealed in their very language."

Basically, this duty was entrusted to only four distinguished persons named above, but later on, other Companions were also attached to help them out. (Fath al-Bari, pp. 13-15, v. 9)

They performed the following functions in connection with the writing of the Qur'ān:

1. In the copy prepared during the period of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه, Sūrahs were not placed in sequence, rather each Sūrah was written separately. They wrote down all Sūrahs in their proper sequence in a single copy. (Mustadrak, 2/229)

2. The verses of the noble Qur'ān were written in a way so that all readings backed by uninterrupted succession could be incorporated within their script. Therefore, no dots or desinential marks were placed on them so that the text could be recited in accordance with all readings that are supported by uninterrupted succession. For instance, they wrote نَسْرَهَا in order that it could be read both نَسْرَهَا and نَسْرُهَا, because both readings are correct. (Manahil al- 'Irfan, 1/253-254)

3. Upto this time, there existed only one single copy of the noble Qur'ān - complete, authentically standard and collectively attested by the whole *ummah*. These distinguished persons prepared more than one copy of this newly organized *Muṣḥaf* (copy of the Qur'ān).

It is generally believed that Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه had accomplished the preparation of five copies, but Abū Hātim Sijistānī says that a total of seven copies were prepared. Out of these one was sent to Makkah al-Mukarramah, one to Syria, one to Yamān, one to Bahrain, one to Baṣrah and one to Kūfah, and one was preserved in Madīnah al-Tayyibah.

4. To accomplish the task cited above, these revered elders basically worked through the pages of the Qur'ān which were written during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه. But, along with it, as a matter of added precaution, they adopted exactly the same method that was employed during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه. Consequently, assorted copies of texts committed into writing during the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ which were preserved by different Companions were recalled once again, and it was, by yet another collation with these, that the new copies were prepared. This time, a separately written verse of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, مِنْ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ رِجَالٌ صَدَقُوا مَا عَاهَدُوا اللَّهَ عَلَيْهِمْ was

found with Sayyidnā Thābit al-Anṣārī رضى الله عنه only. As we have explained earlier, it does not mean that nobody else remembered this verse because Sayyidnā Zayd رضى الله عنه has himself said: 'While writing the copy of the Qur'ān, I could not find the particular verse of Sūrah al-Aḥzāb which I used to hear the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم recite.' This shows very clearly that the verse under reference was something Sayyidnā Zayd and other Companions remembered very well. On the other hand, it also does not mean that this verse never existed in writing anywhere, because this verse was obviously there in the pages of the Qur'ān written during the times of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه. Besides that, obviously enough, this verse was also included in the copies of the noble Qur'ān which were written and preserved by the Companions on their own. But, like it was in the days of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه, this time too, all those scattered documents, available with the Companions in writing, were collected together, therefore, Sayyidnā Zayd رضى الله عنه and others with him did not write down any verse into these copies of the Qur'ān until such time when they did find it in those written documentations as well. As such, the fact was that other verses were found written separately too with several Companions, but this verse from Sūrah al-Aḥzāb was not found written separately with anyone else except Sayyidnā Khudhaymah رضى الله عنه.

5. After having these several standard copies of the Qur'ān prepared, Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه had all copies personally kept by different Companions burnt so that all copies of the Qur'ān become uniform in terms of the script, incorporation of accepted readings and the order of chapters, leaving no room for any difference between them.

The entire *ummah* acknowledged this achievement of Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه with admiration, and the Companions supported him in this venture. The only exception is that of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضى الله عنه who was somewhat unhappy about it, something that cannot be taken up here in its proper perspective. Sayyidnā 'Alī رضى الله عنه says:

"Say nothing about 'Uthmān unless it be in his favour because, by God, whatever he did in connection with copies of the Qur'ān was done in the presence of all of us, and with our advice and counsel." (Fath al-Bari, 9/15)

## Steps Taken to Facilitate Recitation

After the afore-mentioned achievement of Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضى الله عنه, the *ummah* reached a consensus on the rule that it is not permissible to write the text of the noble Qur’ān using any method other than the ‘Uthmāni Script. Consequently, all copies of the Qur’ān were, later on, written in accordance with this method, and the Companions and their successors, may Allah be pleased with them all, by bringing forth repeatedly, reproductions of the standard ‘Uthmāni copies of the Qur’ān, helped spread the noble Qur’ān on a vast scale.

But, the copies of the noble Qur’ān were still devoid of dots and vowel points or desinential marks which made it difficult for non-Arabs to recite them freely. As Islam spread out wide and deep in non-Arab countries, the need to add dots and vowel points became acute, in order that people may be able to recite them easily. Several steps were taken to achieve this purpose. Their brief history is as follows:

## Inclusion of Dots

The practice of placing dots over or under letters was just not there among early Arabs, however, the readers were so used to this style that they had practically no difficulty in reading dot-less writing to the limit that they would easily distinguish between doubtful letters by referring to the context. Specially, there was no possibility of any doubt in the case of the noble Qur’ān because its preservation did not rest on writing, rather on the strength of memories, pursuant to which, Sayyidnā ‘Uthmān رضى الله عنه had assigned *Qārīs*, accomplished reciters of the Qur’ān, along with its copies sent out to various parts of the Muslim world so that they could teach how to read it.

There are different reports as to who first placed dots on the copy of the noble Qur’ān. Some reports say that this feat was first accomplished by Ḥaḍrat Abū al-Aswad al-Du‘alī رحمه الله عليه (al-Burhan, 1/250). Some say he did this under the instructions of Sayyidnā ‘Alī رضى الله عنه (Subh al-A’sha, 3/155). There are others who have said that Ziyād ibn Abī Sufyān, the Governor of Kufah, asked him to do this. Then there is yet another report which credits Hajjaj ibn Yūsuf with this feat who did it with the help of Ḥasan al-Basrī, Yahya ibn Ya‘mur and Naṣr ibn ‘Āṣim al-Laythī, may Allah’s mercy be upon them all. (Tafsir al-Qurtubi, 1/63)

## Marks for correct reading

In the beginning, like dots, the Qur'ān did not have any desinential marks either. Here too, reports are at variance as to who placed desinential marks first. Some say Abū al-Aswad al-Du'ālī did it first while others claim that this was accomplished by Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf through Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur and Naṣr ibn 'Aṣim al-Laythī. (Ibid)

Keeping in view all reports in this connection, it appears that desinential marks were first invented by Abū al-Aswad al-Du'ālī, but they were not like what they are today. Instead, placed there for *fathah* was a dot (•) over the letter, for *kasrah* a dot (◌◌) under the letter, for *ḍammah* a dot (◌◌◌) in front of the letter; and there were two dots (◌◌ or ◌◌◌ or ◌◌◌) for *tanwīn* or nunnation. It was only later that Khalīl ibn Ahmad innovated the signs of *hamzah* (glottal stop) and *tashdīd* (doubling). (Subh al-A'sha, 3/160-161) After that, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf requested Yaḥyā ibn Ya'mur, Naṣr ibn 'Aṣim al-Laythī and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, may Allah's mercy be upon them all, to simultaneously place dots and desinential marks on the text of the noble Qur'ān. On this occasion, the present forms of desinential marks were chosen to replace dots as expression of case signs. The purpose was to avoid confusing them with dots intrinsically belonging to letters.

## Aḥḍāb or Manazil

It was the practice of Companions and their Successors that they would complete the recital of the entire Qur'ān once every week. For this purpose, they had identified fixed portions for their daily recitation which is known as '*ḥizb*' or '*manzil*'. Thus the entire Qur'ān was divided over seven '*aḥḍāb*' (plural of '*ḥizb*') '*manāzil*' (plural of '*manzil*').

(al-Burhan, 1/250)

## Ajzā' or Parts

Today, the Qur'ān is divided over thirty '*ajzā'*' (plural of '*juz*') or parts. This division in parts has nothing to do with the meaning of the Qur'ān. In fact, this division in thirty equal parts has been made to serve as teaching aid for children as, it will be noticed, there are places where the designated part ends with an unfinished statement. It is difficult to say with certainty as to who brought about this division of

the Qur'ān in thirty parts. Some people believe that Sayyidnā 'Uthmān رضى الله عنه had arranged to have these written in thirty different folio-units while their copies were being made, therefore, this division dates back to his time for sure. But, this humble writer was unable to find any proof of this position in the writings of earlier scholars. However, 'Allāmah Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī has written that the thirty parts of the Qur'ān have been known all along and they customarily appear in copies of the Qur'ān used in schools. (al-Burhan, 1/250; Manahil al-'Irfan, 1/402)

### **Akhmās and A'shār: The sets of Fives and Tens**

Another sign used in Qur'ānic copies of early centuries was that they would write the word, *khamṣ* (خمس : five) or its abbreviation (خ) after every five verses (on the margin); and the word, 'Ashr (عشر : ten) or its abbreviation (ع) after every ten verses. The former kind of signs were called 'Akhmās' (a pentad or group of five) and the later, 'A'shār' (a decade or group of ten). Consequent to another difference among early scholars, these signs were considered permissible by some, and reprehensible or *makrūh* by others. Saying, with any degree of certainty, as to who was the first to place the signs, is difficult indeed. According to one view, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf was its inventor, while another view credits this to an order of 'Abbasi Khalīfah, al-Ma'mūn (al-Burhan, 1/251). But, these two views do not appear to be sound since the idea of *a'shār* seems to be there during the times of the Companions. For example, *Masrūq* a well-known *Tabi'ī*, says that with Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd رضى الله عنه the placement of 'A'shār' markings in the copy of the Qur'ān was *makrūh*. (Musannaf ibn Abi Shaybah, 2/497).

### **Rukū' or Section**

Moreover, the signs of *Akhmās* and *A'shār* were abandoned later on but, yet another sign which continues on even to this day is the sign of *rukū'* or section. This has been determined in terms of the contents of the noble Qur'ān whereby a sign of *rukū'* (the letter ع on the margin) is placed at the conclusion of a statement. In spite of his efforts, this humble writer was unable to locate anything authentic which would tell us as to who originated the *rukū'*, and in what period. However, this much is almost certain that the purpose of this sign is to identify an average portion of verses which could be recited in one *raka'ah*. It is called '*rukū'*' so that *rukū'* (bending position) could be made in *ṣalāh*.

after reaching this point. There are 540 *rukū'āt* in the whole Qur'ān. So, by reciting one *rukū'* in every *raka'ah* of *tarāwih*, it is possible to complete the recital of the entire Qur'ān on the night of the twenty seventh (Fatawa 'Alamgiryah, Fasl al-Tarawih, 1/94).

### **Rumūz al-Awqāf: Stop Signs**

Another useful step taken to facilitate recitation and phonetically correct pronunciation (*tilāwah* and *tajwīd*) was to provide signs with Qur'ānic sentences which could tell the nature of making a stop (breathing) there. These signs are known as the '*rumūz*' (signs) or '*alāmāt*' (symbols) of *awqāf* (stops). Their purpose is to help a person who does not know Arabic to stop at the correct spot during his recitation, and thus, avoid causing a change in meaning by breaking his breath at the wrong spot. Most of these signs were first invented by 'Allamāh Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Tayfūr Sajāwandī, may Allah's mercy be upon him (Al-Nashr fi al-Qira'at al-'Ashr, 1/225). Details about these signs are given below:

⤵ : This letter **Tā'** is an abbreviated form of *al-waqf al-mutlaq*. It means that the statement stands completed at this point. Therefore, it is better to stop here.

ج : This letter **Jīm** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-jā'iz* and it means that it is permissible to stop here.

ز : This letter **Zā'** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-mujawwaz*. It means that making a stop here is correct all right, but the better choice is not to make a stop here.

ص : This letter **Ṣād** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-murakhkhaṣ*. It means that the statement has not yet been completed at this point but, because the sentence has become long, here is the place to breathe and stop rather than do it elsewhere (al-Mianh al-Fikriyyah, p. 63).

م : This letter **mīm** is an abbreviation of *al-waqf al-tāzim*. It means if a stop is not made here an outrageous distortion in the meaning of the verse is possible. So, it is better to stop here. Some phoneticians of the Qur'ān have also called this *al-waqf al-wājib* or the obligatory stop. But this is not '*wājib*' of *fiqh* which brings sin if abandoned. In fact, the purpose is to stress that making a stop here is the most preferable of all stops (al-Nashr, 1/231).

ل : This letter **lā** is an abbreviation of *lā taqif*. It means 'do not

stop here,' but it does not imply that making a stop here is impermissible, because there are certain places bearing this sign where making a stop brings no harm and making an initiation from the following word is also permissible. Therefore, the correct meaning of this sign is: If a stop is made here, it is better to go back and read over again. Initiation from the next word is not approved (al-Nashr, 1/233).

As far as the origin of these signs is concerned, it stands proved beyond doubt that they were invented by 'Allamāh Sajāwandī. In addition to these, there are some other signs as well that appear in the copies of the Qur'ān, for instance:

**مع** : This *ma'* is an abbreviation of "*mu'ānaqāh*". This symbol is inserted at a place where a single verse has two possible explanations. According to one explanation, the stop will be made at one given place, while according to another explanation, this will be at another place. So, a stop can be made at either one of the two places, but once a stop has been made at one place, it is not correct to stop at the other. For instance, take the verse **ذَلِكَ مَثَلُهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَمَثَلُهُمْ فِي الْإِنْجِيلِ كَزَرْعٍ أَخْرَجَ شَطْأَهُ**. If a stop is made here at التَّوْرَةِ, then it is not correct to stop at الْإِنْجِيلِ and should a stop be made at الْإِنْجِيلِ, then it is not correct to stop at التَّوْرَةِ. However, if a stop is not made at both places, that will be correct. It is also known as '*al-muqābalah*'. It was, first of all, pointed out by Imām Abū al-Faḍl al-Rāzī (al-Nashr, 1/237 and al-Itqan, 1/88).

**سكته** : This is a symbol for *saktah*. It means one should stop here breaking the sound but not the breath. This is generally inserted at a place where assimilated reading is likely to cause an erroneous projection of meaning.

**وقفه** : At this sign of *waqfah*, one must stop a little longer than *saktah* (pause). But, breath should not break here too.

**ق** : This letter *qāf* is an abbreviation of *qīla* '*alaihi l'waqf*'. It means that some phoneticans of the Qur'ān identify a stop here while others do not.

**قف** : This word is '*qif*' which means 'stop' and it is inserted where the reader may possibly think that a stop was not correct there.

**على** : This is an abbreviation of *al-waṣlu awlā* which means 'it is better to recite in assimilated continuity'.



**صل** : This is an abbreviation of *qad yuṣalū*, that is, some stop here, while others like to recite on in assimilated continuity.

**وقف النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم** : This is marked at places where some *ḥadīth* report proves that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم stopped here while reciting.

### The printing of the Holy Qur'ān

Before the advent of the printing press, all copies of the Qur'ān were calligraphed by hand, and for this purpose, there always has been, in every age, a large group of calligraphers whose sole purpose in life was nothing else except the calligraphy of the Qur'ān. The amount of hard work put in by Muslims in writing the words of the Qur'ān in ever better styles, and the way they demonstrated their intense emotional involvement with this great Book has a long and interesting history of its own which would need a regular book. This is not the appropriate place to go in such details.

With the invention of the printing press, the noble Qur'ān was first printed at Hamburg in 1113 Hijrah, a copy of which is still present in Dār al-Kutub al-Misīyyah. After that, several orientalists arranged the publication of the copies of Qur'ān but they were not received with much approval in the Muslim world. After that, Mawlay 'Uthmān was the first person among Muslims who had one manuscript of the Qur'ān printed at St. Petersburg, a Russian city, in 1787 A.D. Similarly, another manuscript was printed in Qazān also. In 1828 A.D., the Qur'ān was printed by lithography on stone slabs in the Iranian city of Tehran. After that, printed copies of the Qur'ān became common throughout the world. (Tarikh al-Qur'ān by al-Kurdi, p. 186, and 'Ulum al-Qur'ān by Dr. Subhi Saleh; Urdu Translation by Ghulam Ahmad Hariri, p. 142)

### An introduction to the science of *Tafsīr*

Now we can turn to the requisites of *'Ilm al-Tafsīr* or Exegesis. The literal meaning of '*tafsīr*' in the Arabic language is 'to open' or to explain, interpret or comment. Technically, the science of *tafsīr* is a branch of knowledge in which the meanings of the Qur'ān are explained and its injunctions and wisdoms are described openly and clearly (al-Burhan). Addressing the Holy Prophet ﷺ, the Glorious Qur'ān says:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ

We revealed the Qur'ān to you so that you explain to the people what has been sent down to them(16:44).

Once again, the Qur'ān says:

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ

Surely, Allah did a great favour to Muslims when He sent a Messenger to them from among them who would recite His verses before them and purify them and teach them the Book and the Wisdom (3:164).

Keeping this in view, it should be noted that the Holy Prophet ﷺ did not only teach the words of the Qur'ān, but he also explained these in details. This is why, on some occasions, the revered Companions had to devote years together in learning a single Sūrah; details will, *inshallāh*, appear later on.

Until such time that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم graced this mortal world with his presence, seeking the explanation of any verse was not much of a problem. When the Companions faced any difficulty, they would turn to him and get a satisfying answer. But, later on after him, it became necessary that the *tafsīr* of Qur'ān be preserved as a permanent branch of knowledge so that, along with the words of the noble Qur'ān, its correct meaning as well stands protected and conserved for the Muslim *ummah*, and heretics and deviationists find no room there for distortion of its meanings. So, with the grace and *tawfīq* of Allah Almighty, this *ummah* accomplished this wonderful mission with such efficiency that today we can say without any fear of doubt or rejection that not only are the words of this last Book of Allah protected but also stands protected even that correct *tafsīr* and explanation which has reached us through the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his Companions who were ever-prepared to sacrifice their lives for him.

In what ways the Muslim *ummah* protected and preserved the 'ilm (science) of *tafsīr*? What extreme hardships they faced in this pursuit? How many stages did this struggle had to go through? All this has a long and fascinating history which cannot be taken up in the present

context (for this, please see '*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*', a detailed work on this subject by this humble writer). The intention here is to state briefly as to what are the sources of Qur'ānic exegesis and how these sources have been utilized in explaining the noble Qur'ān by all those countless books on '*Ilm al-Tafsīr*' available in every language. These sources are six in number:

## The Sources of *Tafsīr*

### 1. The Glorious Qur'ān

The first source of the knowledge of *tafsīr* is the Holy Qur'ān itself. Accordingly, it happens very often that a certain point which is brief and requires explanation is invariably clarified by some other verse of the Qur'ān itself. For instance, there appears that sentence of prayer in the Sūrah al-Fātiḥah: **إِهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ** that is, 'Guide us in the straight path - the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace...' Now it is not clear here as to who are those whom Allah Almighty has blessed. But, in another verse, they have been identified very clearly where it is said:

فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ  
وَالصَّالِحِينَ

So, these are the people whom Allah Almighty has blessed, being the prophets, their true followers, the martyrs (in the way of Allah) and the righteous. (4:69)

Therefore, when respected commentators explain some verse, they first check to see if a *tafsīr* of this verse is already there elsewhere in the noble Qur'ān itself. If it is there, they elect to go by it as their first choice.

### 2. The *Ḥadīth*

The words and the deeds of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم are called *Ḥadīth*, and as it has been stated earlier, Allah Almighty had sent him with the Qur'ān solely for the purpose that he should explain to people, openly and explicitly, the correct meanings of the noble Qur'ān. Consequently, he discharged this duty with grace and excellence both by his words and deeds. In fact his whole blessed life is, after all, a practical *tafsīr* of Qur'ān. It is for this reason that

respected commentators, in order to understand the Qur'ān, have laid the greatest emphasis on *Ḥadīth* as the second source, and it is in the light of *ahadīth* that they have determined the meanings of the Book of Allah. However, because all sorts of narrations - sound, weak, and fabricated - are included in *Ḥadīth*, therefore research-oriented commentators do not accept a narration as trustworthy until it withstands the principles used in the scrutiny of *Ḥadīth* narrations. Hence, finding a *ḥadīth* report somewhere, looking at it, and then employing it to determine a certain *tafsīr* is not correct, because that report could be weak, even contrary to other stronger reports. This is really a very delicate matter, and venturing therein is the exclusive prerogative of those who have spent their years in mastering these fields of knowledge.

### 3. The Reports from the *Ṣaḥābah*

The noble *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions), may Allah be pleased with them all, had received their education directly from the Holy Prophet ﷺ. In addition to that, they were personally present on the scene when *Wahy* came, and they had themselves witnessed all circumstances and backgrounds of the revelation of the Qur'ān. Therefore, naturally, the recorded statements of these blessed souls are far more authentic and trustworthy in explaining the noble Qur'ān; the later people cannot take that place. Hence, in the case of verses the explanation of which is not found in the Qur'ān or *Ḥadīth*, statements recorded from the noble Companions are given the highest priority. Consequently, if there is a consensus of Companions on the explanation of a certain verse, the commentators follow just that, and explaining it in any way, other than that, is not permissible. By the way, if the statements of Companions differ in the interpretation (*tafsīr*) of a certain verse, then the commentators who come later examine them in the light of arguments and determine as to which interpretation or explanation can be given preference. In order to handle this situation, there is an important corpus of rules and regulations already codified under the sciences of *Usūl al-Fiqh*, *Usūl al-Ḥadīth* and *Usūl al-Tafsīr* a detailed discussion of which is not appropriate here.

### 4. The Reports from the *Tābi'īn* or Successors

After Companions (*Ṣaḥābah*) come the Successors (*Tābi'īn*). The later are those who have learnt the *tafsīr* of Qur'ān from the

Companions. Therefore, their statements too have great importance in the science of *tafsīr*, although there exists a difference among scholars whether or not the statements of the *tābi'īn* are decisive evidences in *tafsīr* (al-Itqan, 2/179) but their importance is something which cannot be denied.

### 5. The Arabic Language

Since the noble Qur'ān was revealed in the Arabic language, therefore, in order to explain the Qur'ān, it is necessary to have a complete mastery over the language. There are several verses of the noble Qur'ān in the background of which there happen to be just no attending circumstances of revelations, or any juristic or scholastic question, therefore, in their *tafsīr* or explanation, the sayings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم or the statements of the *ṣaḥābah* and *tābi'īn* are not reported. For that reason, the only means through which these can be explained is that of the Arabic language, and it is on the basis of language alone that they are elucidated. Besides that, should there be some difference in the *tafsīr* of a certain verse, then, in that case too, the science of linguistics is used to run a test of veracity between varying opinions.

### 6. Deliberation and Deduction

The last source of *tafsīr* consists of deliberation and deduction. The subtleties and mysteries of the noble Qur'ān are an ocean with no shore, no end. Therefore, the more a person, who has been blessed with insight into the Islamic sciences by Allah Almighty, deliberates in it, the more he discovers ever-new mysteries and subtleties. As a result of this, commentators do present the outcomes of their respective deliberations as well, but mysteries and subtleties so described are found acceptable only when they do not go against the five sources mentioned above. So, should a person, while explaining the Qur'ān, come out with a subtle point or independent judgment which is contrary to the Qur'ān and Sunnah, Consensus (*Ijmā'*), Language, or the statements of Companions and Successors, or stands in conflict with another principle of Shari'ah, that will then have no credence. Some mystics (رحمهم الله) had started describing such mysteries and subtleties in *tafsīr*, but investigative scholars of the *ummah* did not consider these trustworthy because the personal opinion of any

person against the basic principles of the Qur'ān, Sunnah and Shari'ah has obviously no weight. (al-Itqan, 2/184)

### The rules relating to Israelite reports

Judaica or *Isrā'īliyyāt* are narratives which have reached us through Jews and Christians. It may be noted that early commentators used to write down all sorts of narrations which reached them from an identified source. Many of these narrations were straight Judaica. Therefore, it is equally necessary to know what they really are. The reality is that some noble Companions and their Successors first belonged to the religion of the people of the Book, later on when they became Muslims and learnt the Qur'ān, they came across several events relating to past communities in the Qur'ān and which they had also read in the books of their previous religion. Therefore, while referring to the events mentioned in the Qur'ān they would describe other details before Muslims which they had seen in the books of their old religion. These very details have entered into the books of *tafsir* under the name of '*Isrā'īliyyāt*'. Ḥāfiẓ ibn Kathīr, who is one of the authentic research scholars, has written that there are three kinds of '*Isrā'īliyyāt*':

1. Narrations the truth of which is proved from other evidences of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, for instance, the drowning of Pharoah and and the ascent of Sayyidnā Mūsā عليه السلام onto Mount *Tūr* (Sinai).

2. Narrations the falsity of which is proved from other evidences of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, for instance, it appears in Judaic narrations that Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام had become (God forbid) an apostate in his later years. Its refutation is proved from the Qur'ān. It is said there: 'وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ كَفَرُوا'. 'It was not Sulaymān who became an infidel, but the devils did become infidels' (2:102). To cite yet another example, it finds mention in Judaic narrations that (God forbid) Sayyidnā Dawūd عليه السلام (David) committed adultery with the wife of his general (Uriah), or, having him killed through all sorts of contrivances, ended up marrying his wife. This too is a blatant lie, and taking such narrations to be false is imperative.

3. Narrations regarding which the Qur'ān, the Sunnah and the Shari'ah are silent, such as the injunctions of Torah etc., are subjects about which silence is to be observed as taught by the Holy Prophet ﷺ

: 'Neither confirm, nor falsify'. There is, however, a difference of opinion among scholars whether or not reporting such narrations is permissible. Hāfiẓ ibn Kathīr has given the decisive word by saying that reporting these is permissible all right but doing so is useless because they cannot be taken as authentic. (Muqaddamah Tafsīr ibn Kathīr)

### **A misconception about the *tafsir* of Qur'ān**

Hopefully, details given above have made it clear that the *tafsīr* (exegesis or interpretation) of the noble Qur'ān is an extremely delicate and difficult undertaking for which getting to know the Arabic language alone is not enough. In fact, it is necessary to have expertise in all related branches of knowledge. Therefore, scholars say that a *mufasssir* or commentator of the Qur'ān must have vast and deep knowledge of the syntax, etymology, rhetoric, and literature of the Arabic language, as well as, that of prophetic Traditions, principles governing jurisprudence and exegesis, doctrinal articles of belief and scholastics. The reason is that one cannot arrive at correct conclusions while explaining the Qur'ān unless there be that adequacy in these fields of knowledge.

It is regrettable that a dangerous epidemic has overtaken Muslims lately whereby many people have started taking the sole reading ability of Arabic sufficient for the *tafsīr* (interpretation) of the Qur'ān. As a result, anyone who gets to read ordinary Arabic starts passing out opinions in the domain of Qur'ānic exegesis. Rather, it has been noticed on occasions that people having just passable familiarity with the Arabic language, and who have yet to master their Arabic to perfection, take it upon themselves to engage in explaining the Qur'ān following their whims, even going to the limit of finding faults with classical commentators. Bad come to worse, there are some subtle tyrants who would, by simply reading the translation, imagine that they have become scholars of the Qur'ān, not even feeling shy of criticising commentators of great stature.

It should be understood very clearly that this is a highly dangerous pattern of behaviour which, in matters of religion, leads to fatal straying. As regards secular arts and sciences, everyone can claim to understand that should a person simply learn the English language and go on to study books of medical science, he would not be

acknowledged as a physician by any reasonable person anywhere in the world, and certainly not trustworthy enough to take care of somebody's life unless he has been educated and trained in a medical college. Therefore, having learnt English is not all one needs to become a doctor.

Similarly, should anyone knowing English hope to become an engineer just by reading through engineering books, it is clear that no sane person in this world would accept him as an engineer. The reason is that this technical expertise cannot be acquired simply by learning the English language. It would, rather, need a formal training in the discipline under the supervision and guidance of expert teachers. When these stringent requirements are inevitable in order to become a doctor or engineer, how can the learning of Arabic language alone become sufficient in matters relating to the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*? In every department of life, everyone knows and acts upon the principle that every art or science has its own particular method of learning and its own peculiar conditions. Unless these are fulfilled, the learner's opinion in given arts and sciences will not be considered trustworthy. If that is so, how can the Qur'ān and the Sunnah become so unclaimed a field of inquiry that there be no need to acquire any art or science in order to explain them, and anyone who so wishes starts passing out opinions in this matter?

Some people say that the Qur'ān has itself stated that: **وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ** : 'And surely We have made the Qur'ān easy for the sake of good counsel.' And since the noble Qur'ān is a simple book, its explanation hardly needs much of a support from any art or science. But this argument is terribly fallacious, which is, in itself, based on lack of intellect and plenty of superficiality. The fact is that the verses of the Qur'ān are of two kinds. Firstly, there are the verses that offer general good counsel, relate lesson-oriented events and introduce subjects dealing with taking of warning and acting on sound advice. Examples of this are the mortality of the world, the accounts of Paradise and Hell, the discourses likely to create the fear of God and the concern for the Hereafter, and other very simple realities of life. Verses of this kind are undoubtedly easy and anyone who knows the Arabic language can benefit from their good counsel by understanding them.



It is in relation to teachings of this kind that, in the verse cited above, it was said that 'We have made them easy'. Hence, the word *لذکر* (for the sake of good counsel) in the verse itself is pointing out towards this meaning.

Contrary to this, the other kind consists of verses which include injunctions, laws, articles of faith and intellectual subjects. Understanding verses of this kind as they should be rightfully understood and deducing and formulating injunctions and rulings from them cannot be done by just any person unless one has the insight and permeating reach into the Islamic areas of knowledge. This is why the noble Companions, whose mother-tongue was Arabic and they did not have to go anywhere to get trained into understanding Arabic, used to spend long periods of time in learning the Qur'ān from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. 'Allamāh al-Suyuti has reported from Imām Abū 'Abd al-Raḥman Sulami that the Companions, who formally learned the Qur'ān from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم such as Sayyidnā 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd and others, have told us that, after having learnt ten verses of the Qur'ān from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, they would not proceed on to the next verses until such time that they had covered all that was intellectually and practically involved in the light of these verses. They used to say:

فَتَعَلَّمْنَا الْقُرْآنَ وَالْعِلْمَ وَالْعَمَلَ جَمِيعًا

We have learnt the Qur'ān, knowledge and action all in one.

(al-Itqan 2/176)

Consequently, as reported in Mu'aṭṭā' of Imām Mālik, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar رضى الله عنه spent full eight years memorizing Sūrah al-Baqarah alone and, as in the Musnad of Aḥmad, Sayyidnā Anas رضى الله عنه says that 'one of us who would learn Sūrah al-Baqarah and Sūrah 'āl-'Imrān had his status enormously raised among us.' (Ibid)

Worth noticing is the fact that these noble Companions whose mother-tongue was Arabic, who had the highest degree of expertise in poetry and letters and who would have no difficulty in having very long *qaṣīdah* poems perfectly committed to their memories with the least of effort, why would they need, just to memorize the Qur'ān and

understand its meanings, as long a time as eight years, and that too, for mastering one Sūrah? The only reason for this was that proficiency in the Arabic language was not enough to have a learning of the noble Qur'ān and areas of knowledge bearing on it. In order to do that, it was also necessary to seek the benefit of the teaching and the company of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Now this is so obvious that the noble Companions inspite of having an expertise in the Arabic language and notwithstanding their being direct witnesses to the revelation, still needed the process of going through formal education at the feet of the blessed master in order to become the 'alims of the Qur'ān, how then, after all these hundreds of years following the revelation of the Qur'ān, just by cultivating an elementary familiarity with Arabic, or by simply looking at translations, can anyone claim to having become a commentator of the Qur'ān? What a monstrous audacity and what a tragic joke with knowledge and religion! People who opt for such audacity should remember well that the Holy Prophet ﷺ has said:

من قال فى القرآن بغير علم فليتبوا مقعده فى النار

Whoever says anything about the Qur'an without knowledge, then he should make his abode in Hell. (Abu Daw'ud, as in al-Itqan, 2/179)

And he has also said:

من تكلم فى القرآن برأيه فأصاب فقد أخطأ

Whoever talks about the Qur'an on the basis of his opinion, and even if says something true in it, still he made a mistake.

(Abu Daw'ud, Nasa'i)

## Famous Commentaries of the Qur'ān

Countless commentaries of the Glorious Qur'ān have been written since the blessed period of the Prophethood. In fact, no other book of the world has been served as much as the noble Qur'ān. Introducing all these commentaries is not possible even in some detailed book, much less in a brief introduction such as this. But, what we wish to do here is to introduce very briefly the major commentaries that have served as particular sources of Ma'ariful Qur'ān and which have been cited there time and again. Although, during the period the above commentary was being written, many commentaries and hundreds of books were constantly referred to, but here, the purpose is to limit the introduction to commentaries the references to which will appear

repeatedly.

### **Tafsīr ibn Jarīr**

The real name of this *Tafsīr* is Jāmi' al-Bayān and it was compiled by 'Allamāh Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (died 310 Hijrah). 'Allamāh Ṭabarī is a highly rated commentator, *muḥaddith* (*ḥadīth* expert) and historian. It is said that he kept writing for forty years continuously and used to write forty pages every day (al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, v. 11, p. 145). There are charges of being *Shi'ah* against him, but researchers have refuted this charge and the truth of the matter is that he is a highly regarded scholar of the followers of the Sunnah, rather one of the *Shi'ite* scholars.

Being in thirty volumes, his *Tafsīr* enjoys the status of a basic source for later commentaries. In his explanation of the verses, he quotes different scholars and then goes on to prove the position which, according to him, is weightier, of course, with arguments and proofs. It must, however, be admitted that narrations of all sorts, sound and weak, have found a place in his commentary. Because of this, not every narration presented by him can be relied upon. In reality, he was aiming through his commentary to collect and compile all narrations that could become available to him, so that this collected material could be put to use later on. Conceded is the fact that he has given the chain of reporters along with each narration so that whoever wishes to investigate into the chain of narrators could do so and decide for himself if the narrations are true or false.

### **Tāfsīr ibn Kathīr**

Ḥāfiẓ 'Imād al-dīn Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī al-Shafī'i (died 774 Hijrah), a distinguished research scholar of the eighth century, is the author of this commentary. It has been published in four volumes. Here emphasis has been laid on explanatory narrations. A special feature is his criticism as *ḥadīth* expert on different narrations, and from this point of view, this book holds a distinct place among all books of *Tafsīr*.

### **Tafsīr Al-Qurṭubī**

Its full name is Al-Jāmi' li-Ahkām al-Qur'ān. It was written by the famous learned writer and research scholar of Andalusia (Spain), Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Abi Bakr ibn Farah al-Qurṭubī

(died 671 Hijrah). He was a follower of the Mālikī school of *fiqh* and was known all over for his *ibādah* and piety. The fact is that the basic objective of this book was to deduce juristic injunctions and rulings from the Qur'ān yet, while doing so, he has also provided the explanation of verses, research into difficult words, discussion of diacritical marks and elegance of style and composition, and related Traditions and Reports in his *Tafsīr*, and quite ably so. This book is in twelve volumes and has been published repeatedly.

### **Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr**

This is the work of Imām Fakhr al-din al-Razi (died 606 Hijrah). Its real name is Mafatih al-Ghayb, but is popularly known as 'Tafsīr Kabīr'. Imām Rāzī is an *imām* of the theology of Islam, therefore, great emphasis has been laid in his *Tafsīr* on rational and scholastic debates and on the refutation of false sects. But, the truth is that this *Tafsīr* is, in its own way, a unique key to the Qur'ān as well. Furthermore, the pleasing way in which the meanings of the Qur'ān have been clarified and the mutual link of the Qur'ānic verses established, is all too praise-worthy. Most likely, Imām Rāzī himself wrote down his *Tafsīr* as far as Sūrah al-Fath. Onwards from there, he could not complete. So, the remaining part of the *Tafsīr*, from Sūrah al-Fath to the end, was completed by Qādī Shihāb al-Din ibn Khalīl al-Khawālī al-Dimashqī (died 639 Hijrah) or Shaykh Najm al-Dīn Ahmad ibn Muḥammad al-Qamūlī (died 777 Hijrah). (Kashaf al-Zunūn v. 2, p. 477)

Imām Rāzī has particularly emphasised scholastic debates and the refutation of false sects in accordance with the dictates of his time, and while doing so, his discussions have become too lengthy at several places, therefore, some people have made the following comment on his *Tafsīr*: *فيه كل شيء الا التفسير*: 'There is everything in this (book) except the *Tafsīr*.' But this comment is a terrible injustice to Tafsīr Kabīr. That which is the truth has already been stated above, namely, that this *Tafsīr* enjoys a high rating as far as the resolution of the meanings of the Qur'ān is concerned. But, there are places where he has explained verses of the Qur'ān while moving away from the consensus of the *ummah*, however, such places are very thinly spread out in this book that goes on to eight volumes.

### **Tafsīr al-Bahr al-Muḥīṭ**

This was written by ‘Allāmah Abū Hayyān al-Gharnāṭī al-Andalūsī (died 754 Hijrah) who was a master of syntax and rhetoric in addition to other Islamic fields of learning. As a result of this, his own *Tafsīr* is soaked in syntax and rhetoric. He places special stress on investigating into the words of every verse, the difference in structures and on points of eloquence.

### **Aḥkām al-Qur’ān by al-Jaṣṣāṣ**

This was written by Imām Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ al-Rāzī (died 370 Hijrah) who occupies a distinguished place among Hanafi jurists. The deduction of juristic injunctions and rulings from the noble Qur’ān is the subject of this book. Instead of explaining verses in serial continuity, he has taken up the juristic details as called for by verses which consist of juristic injunctions. Several other books have also been written on this subject, but this book enjoys a prominent place among those.

### **Tafsīr al-Durr al-Manthūr**

This was written by ‘Allāmah Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (died 910 Hijrah). Its full name is ‘al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi l’Ma’thūr.’ Here ‘Allāmah al-Suyūṭī has tried to collect all narrations about the *tafsīr* of Qur’ān he was able to find. Several *ḥadīth* scholars such as Hāfiz ibn Jarīr, Imām Baghawi, Ibn Mardūwayh, Ibn Hibbān and Ibn Mājah and others had already worked in this area on their own. ‘Allāmah al-Suyūṭī has assembled narrations presented by all of them in this book. But, rather than refer to complete chain of authorities along with narrations, he has found it sufficient to simply name the particular author who has presented that narration under his authority so that, if needed, one could go back to the work and investigate into the ultimate authority. Since his purpose was to put together a mass of narrations, as a result of which, all sorts of narrations, sound and weak, have found their way into his book. Hence, every narration allowed entry by him cannot be considered reliable without investigation into its authority. There are occasions when ‘Allāmah al-Suyūṭī does indicate with each narration the degree of its authority as well. But, as he is known to be fairly easy-going in respect of *ḥadīth* critique, it is still difficult to fully rely on that too.

## Al-Tafsīr al-Mazhari

This was written by Qādi Thanāullah Pānīpatī (died 1225 Hijrah). He has named this *Tafsīr* as 'Al-Tafsīr al-Mazhari' after the name of his spiritual master, Mirzā Mazhar Jān-e-Jānān Dehlavī. This *Tafsīr* of his is very simple and clear, and extremely useful to locate brief explanations of Qur'ānic verses. Along with the elucidation of Qur'ānic words, he has also taken up related narrations in ample details, and in doing so, he has made an effort to accept narrations after much more scrutiny as compared with other commentaries.

## Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī

The full name of this *Tafsīr* is 'Ruh al-Ma'ani fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azim wa al-Sab' al-Mathani' and it was written by 'Allāmah Maḥmud al-Ālūsī (died 1270 Hijrah), the famous scholar of the last period of Baghdad, and comprises of thirty volumes. He has made his best possible effort to make this *Tafsīr* comprehensive. There are exhaustive discussions on language, syntax, letters, style, and on jurisprudence, articles of faith, scholastics, philosophy, astronomy, mysticism and related narratives of Traditions. He has made an attempt to leave no intellectual aspect pertaining to a verse unexplained. In the case of *ḥadīth* narratives as well, the author of this work has been more cautious as compared to other commentators. From this angle, this is a very comprehensive commentary, and no future venture in connection with the Tafsir of the Qur'ān can now afford to ignore its help.

